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Spotter Bob in New York; OR, THE Man From 'Way Back.

BY WILLIAM G. PATTEN.



THE CROOK CAUGHT UP THE SMALLER MAN AND FLUNG HIM BODILY OVER THE IRON GATE!

Spotter Bob in New York;

OR,

THE MAN FROM 'WAYBACK.

BY WILLIAM G. PATTEN,

AUTHOR OF "NOBBY NAT, THE TENDERFOOT DETECTIVE," "SHARPER STOKES'S DOUBLE DEAL," ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

BOB SPOTS SOMETHING CROOKED.

By 6:30 o'clock P. M. the rush of people for the Elevated Station at Park Place and Church street begins to slacken somewhat, although there is still a great throng anxious to get up-town as soon as possible by the Sixth Avenue L.

One night a bright-looking, clean-faced, fairly well-dressed boy of about sixteen stood on the curb not far from the newsman's stand that is situated at the foot of the stairs leading to the Park Place station. In his hand he held a tray covered with black velvet, on which were scattered a large number of patent collar-buttons and cuff-supporters.

"Here's where you get 'em, gents!" he cheerfully called. "Here's the only and reliable cuff-holder that's got a double back-action grip as won't let your cuffs slip down and take a bath in yer soup when you eat your dinner. And they're only ten cents—a dime a pair. Silver-nickel plated and right up to the rush of progress. Who has another pair? Business is business, and business is rushing on my corner. Have a pair of cuff-supporters, sir? Ten cents. Thank you."

His bright face and cheery manner were in such contrast to the face and air of the usual street vender that many hurrying individuals glanced at him with mild surprise, not to say curious interest. For all of the fact that it was a bad time to sell goods when people were in a hurry to get home, many of them having to ride far beyond the Harlem River, he did a very good business, and his stock in trade gradually diminished.

Although he was bright and shrewd, as could be seen at a glance, there was something in his appearance which indicated that he had not been brought up as a street walf, his speech, for all of the fact that it was not always correct, being far from the dialect of the gamin and gutter-snipe.

That he was city-bred, probably the son of "poor but respectable parents," was equally apparent. That he had not come from the country could be told at a glance.

His dark eyes saw the face of every man who passed him in the throng; not one did he miss, whether he was making a sale or not. Even though he was attending strictly to business, it also appeared—or would have appeared to a keen observer—that he had another purpose besides selling collar-buttons and cuff-supporters.

"Have a patent collar-button, sir?" he called, holding up the article. "Gold plated and pearl backed—goes at the back of the neck and clinches the collar—has an extension point that gets a grip on the necktie and keeps it from crawling up and tickling yer ears. Only five cents—a nickle—to night, and ye may never have another chance to get 'em for that. Take one? That's business! Here you go."

The collar-button and five-cent piece changed hands in a twinkling, and the boy rattled on with his never-ending flow of gab.

An Italian shoestring-vender came down and attempted to range up beside the young fakir, but the boy promptly turned on him, crying:

"Git off my preserves, you son of Sunny Italy! Your place is up the street. I didn't

bother you when I first saw you there, and I won't have you cutting into my trade. If you don't take a tumble and get a move on, I'll ornament your dark eyes with a beautiful fresco that you'll carry right around with you for the rest of the week. Git, Dago!"

The Dago promptly moved.

At length two men, who immediately attracted the notice of the boy, came down Park Place from Broadway. Both were plainly and non-expensively dressed, but the garments of one did not sit well on his person, as if he were accustomed to clothing of another sort. He was the smaller man of the two, and he walked with the swinging lope that always betrays those who dwell beyond the limits of city or town and walk much over uneven ground. His face was smooth-shaved and very pale, as if he had lately recovered from a severe illness that had confined him beneath a roof for a protracted period.

The second was a city man, and he was certainly not of a very respectable order of society, although he was plainly attempting to appear at his best while with the other. He was a powerfully-built fellow, and the hand-me-down clothes he wore fitted him as if they had been made by a Broadway tailor. His face might have appeared fairly pleasant at a distance and while in repose, but there was something about it that told a character-reader its owner was a ruffian by nature, no matter how much he tried to conceal the fact.

The city man was talking with great apparent earnestness, while the other listened attentively, now and then nodding or shaking his head, but never speaking.

The eyes of the boy fakir glistened when he fairly saw the face of the city man.

"That's Budge Farrel!" he muttered; "and Budge knows the man I'm lookin' after. He's a crook from the ground up, but t'other feller don't look sneaky. Wonder what's the lay? I have it! Ten to one Budge is workin' the confidence game on that man. If so, I'll block his little racket, or I'm not Spotter Bob, the Rogue-Crusher!"

The men passed but did not ascend the stairs to the Elevated Station. Instead, they entered by the swinging doors of the saloon at the corner and disappeared within the drink resort.

As they passed the boy, Spotter Bob—to give the young fakir the name he had called himself—heard the city man say:

"If he's in New York, I'm der man to find him, chummy, an' don't yer fergit it! I've got a rep as a private detective, an' I can't be beat in dis town, if I do say so, myself."

"Well, that's what I call gall!" gasped the boy street vender. "Budge Farrel a private detective! That takes the bun, an' no miscount! Why, he's done time more than once! If I don't git onto his neck this trip, I oughter go put myself in soak. I'll do it, bet yer pneumatic tire!"

All idea of "business," in that locality, seemed to vanish from his head, and he straightway sauntered toward the saloon, which he did not hesitate to enter.

The two men he was shadowing stood near one end of the bar, and Budge, the crook, was still talking earnestly, with an evident attempt to impress the other.

Without attracting attention, Bob moved along until he was near enough to hear what Farrel was saying, and there he stopped and began, apparently, to count over what remained of his stock in trade. As he was clean, well-dressed and minus the gamin air, he did not immediately attract the attention of the bartenders or frequenters of the place. As he stood there, he heard Budge saying:

"Of course it won't be no dead easy pie to find dis cove in a city like New York, but, I'll ring him in time, an' don't yer fergit dat! Youse just want me ter find him an' put ye on—dat's all?"

The pale-faced man nodded, but did not speak.

"An' you say he's a gambler—can't keep away from der game, eh?"

Another nod.

"Known as Walt Dirk, or Black Dirk?"

Another nod.

"Do youse reckon he'll be wearin' dat name in dis town?"

A positive shake of the head.

"Ain't that jay got no tongue?" thought the listening and watching boy shadow. "He ain't deaf, if he is dumb. If I ain't a Reub, he's from the wild and woolly West somewhere near 'Wayback.' He's got it painted all over him bigger'n a house. I'd like to hear him vocalize a mite."

His desire was not gratified, for the pale-faced man spoke not a word, although Farrel rattled on, now and then asking questions. When these questions could not be answered by yes or no, the stranger hastily scribbled something on a pad of paper he had ready for a purpose, using a stubby lead-pencil to write with.

Thus it quickly became obvious to Bob that the man either could or would not speak, for all of the fact that he could hear as well as any one.

The two men obtained drinks at the bar and then they leaned on the rail to continue the rather one-sided conversation.

Bob now saw that one of the barkeepers had spotted him, and so he quietly wandered out. He took a stand not far from the door and "made a bluff" at trying to do business, but it was apparent he cared very little whether he sold any more goods or not. He was waiting for the two men to appear.

In about twenty minutes they came out and turned back along Park Place toward Broadway. They passed the Elevated Station stairs and entered the first eating-room to which they came.

Bob quietly sauntered up, and, through the glass doors, he could watch the two at the table where they were sitting. He held this position until they had satisfied their hunger and come out upon the street again. As they were very deliberate about eating, it was nearly eight o'clock when they stepped on the sidewalk once more.

They immediately turned toward the L Road and ascended the stairs, Budge Farrel leading the way.

In a twinkling, Spotter Bob's stock in trade disappeared into his pockets, and then slap, slap, slap—his tray was folded into a small, square, compact block. Whistling gayly, as if thoroughly light-hearted, he darted up the stairs after the two suspects, slapped down his nickel, dropped his ticket in the chopper's box, and was just in time to board the forward end of the last car but one of a train, his sharp eyes seeing the men he was after step through the gate upon the rear end of the same car.

By this time, few people were riding up-town, the rush being over for the night, and it so happened that Bob was the only person to ride in the car he had entered. The rear car was also empty as he saw at a glance through the glass of the doors.

Budge Farrel and the stranger remained on the platform, as if they desired a taste of the breeze they could obtain there.

The young spotter dropped down in a seat where he could watch them, having walked more than half the length of the car. The brakeman flung the door open and left it so, much to the boy shadower's satisfaction.

And now Bob appeared to be seized by sudden drowsiness, for he pulled his soft hat over his eyes and seemed to be nodding before Chambers street was reached. But the artful Robert was wide awake, and he noted every move of the two men.

"Next station Franklin," called the guard, as he slammed the iron gate shut at Cham-

bers street and pulled the signal-rope for the train to go ahead. After this, he went forward to talk with the guard ahead, and the two men were left alone on the platform.

The observant boy saw Budge Farrel peer after the guard and then glance into both cars searchingly. He discerned nothing but a boy who had his hat pulled over his eyes and was nodding drowsily.

All at once, with the motion of a cat, the city ruffian turned on his companion.

"So yer want to find Black Dirk! Well, jest hop down inter der street an' find him!"

And the ruffian crook caught up the smaller man and flung him bodily over the iron gate!

CHAPTER II.

THEY SEE THEIR MAN.

FROM his position within the car, Spotter Bob saw it all, but the movement of the thug had been so swift that the watchful lad did not divine his purpose until he had lifted the pale-faced man and held him suspended over the street, to be cast down into which meant terrible injuries or certain death.

"Hey, you skunk!"

Bob leaped to his feet, uttering the cry. He saw the small man clutch at the gate with his hands and obtain a hold that was insecure but supported him for the moment. Then Budge Farrel lifted his foot to bring the heel of his heavy shoe down on the fingers of the unfortunate human being who was clinging fast for dear life.

The thug did not seem to hear Bob's cry, but he felt Bob's fist in a jiffy.

"Take that, you murderin' whelp! Right smack in the kisser—and down you go!"

The boy's hard fist caught Budge fairly in the mouth, and the big ruffian actually went down. His fall, to tell the truth, was caused by the fact that he had one foot uplifted, being on the point of crushing the clinging fingers of the imperiled man when he was struck by the young fakir. Down came his foot, and he placed it fairly between the platforms of the two cars. Thus, finding no support, he was overthrown.

Bob didn't give Budge a second look, but turned to render assistance to the man who was clinging desperately to the iron gate, liable to fall to his death at any instant.

"Your hand! That's it! Now—up you come!"

Before the stricken thug could struggle to his feet, the silent man of the pale face was climbing back over the iron gate. And there was a look on his face that literally made Budge Farrel tremble.

The big ruffian looked around for some mode of escape, for he saw the deadly purpose of the man he had tried to kill blazing in that man's eyes.

The train was just pulling into the Franklin street station, and the guard who had gone forward was hurrying back to his post.

Budge did not wait for him to open the gate, but, with one swing, he sprang over it, struck the platform and fled for his life.

The silent man's hand had gone to his hip and back again. It held a revolver, and he half lifted it, as if intending to take a shot at the escaping villain.

A moment he stood thus; then, slowly shaking his head, he lowered the weapon and restored it to his pocket, his manner saying as plainly as words that he would wait till he met his man again.

"Well, old socks, ye got off easy that time," exclaimed the boy spotter, as Farrel rushed past the ticket-chopper and disappeared at the head of the stairs leading to the street.

"What's the matter here?" blustered the guard. "What's this flourishing weapons for?"

"Stay at yer post an' you'll know next time," saucily replied Bob.

"What's that? Hang your impudence! I'll—"

The irate guard would have seized the lad, but he felt a grip on his arm, and the steady eyes of the silent man looked into his and caused him to change his mind, although not a word was spoken. He snapped open one gate and closed it again with a slam, at the same time giving the signal-rope a snatching jerk.

In the mean time the silent man had turned to the boy and grasped his hand warmly, while he looked searchingly and gratefully into Bob's face. He still declined to speak, if such a thing were possible, but that look was enough to show his feelings fully.

"Oh, 'twasn't nothin'!" stammered the young fakir. "I'd 'a' done it fer any cove what was jumped in such measly style by a bigger chap. I know Budge Farrel fer a rascal, an' it's my delight to knock out rascals; that's why they call me the Rogue-Crusher. I'm a sort of private detective on my own hook. Mebbe bimeby when I do something big, Byrnes'll hear of me an' give me a posish on the force—who knows?"

The silent stranger nodded his head, as if he hoped such a thing might happen. He did not smile at the boy; in fact, his face seemed to continually remain grave and placid. His eyes talked, if the metaphor is allowable.

They entered the car together and sat down side by side. The man took out a pad and pencil, after which he wrote the question:

"What is your name?"

The boy promptly replied

"Bob Braddock."

"Belong in New York?" wrote the man.

"No; Phillydelfy."

"Been here long?"

"Two weeks."

"Know the town?"

"From start to finish."

"I'm a stranger," wrote the singular man.

"Came here from Idaho. Out there they call me Silent Dave. I don't know much about New York, and I want to get somebody to pilot me around. I'll pay well. Take the job?"

The boy hesitated a moment before he replied:

"Mebbe so. I'm here myself, on business—lookin' fer my sister. She run erway from home to go on the stage, an' she's somewhere in this town. If I kin be looking for her at the same time, mebbe I'll show ye the ropes, stranger."

"It can be done. I'm looking for a man known in Idaho as Black Dirk. Farrel said he was a private detective and would find my man."

"Him a private detective! Why, I knowed him in Phillydelfy, an' he was sent up once, there! He's a crook. Why don't you call on the reg'lars?"

"Don't want them involved. I have a score to settle with this Black Dirk that is not covered by law. We'll settle it hand-to-hand."

"I take it this Budge knows the cove you're lookin' fer, else he'd never tried to give ye the dump. An' Budge knows my man, too."

The Silent Man from Idaho looked at his companion inquiringly, and Bob went on:

"Saw them tergeth'er once. That's why I follered Budge Farrel this eve. I was hopin' he'd take me to my man."

"I thought you were looking for your sister?"

"So I be, but I saw her drivin' in the Park with a man one day, and now I want to find him. She hain't on ther stage, so I'd like to know jest what she is doin'. Farrel is a out-and-in crook, an' the man I saw her with is chummy with Farrel, so that looks like he is crooked too. I'm afraid Jess is in trouble. When she run away, the governor told her never to come back any more; but, now that he's dead, mother is dyin' to see her. She left a good nice feller, too; an' Frank Anson has been waitin' for her to come home. He's

white, an' she'll never git a better. What fools some girls be!"

The man nodded, as if he fully agreed, and then he wrote:

"I'll pay you two dollars a day or more to show me around, and you look for your man at the same time. Board at my expense. Does it go?"

After a few moments of thought, Bob nodded.

"I reckon that's all right. I'll stan' as much show as I do now, an' I'm sure of steady pay. I hev to send money to mother, you know, fer we're down-to-bedrock poor. Father had a boodle oncet, but he lost it in some kind of a deal. Jess was always great on diamonds an' dress, an' that was what took her off to New York. Father'd never take her back after that. Since I came here, I was up in Central Park one day, an' I saw a stylish trap whirling along with the other turnouts. Jess was in it, an' she was togged fit to see the queen. There was a big man with a black mustache beside her, an' that's the man I'm lookin' fer. She didn't see me, an' when I tried to overtake the carriage, a sparrow cop pulled me up, so they got erway."

"We'll find her. Help me, and I'll help you. We'll form a combine. What say?"

"Well, I kinder like you, if you don't talk a great heap, an' I reckon it goes."

Again the hands of the man and boy met.

The Twenty-third street station was just passed and Bob was looking down into the street when he gave a cry:

"There he is!"

The Silent Man glanced out instantly, and his eyes fell on the very man at whom the boy was looking—a man who was sitting in a bootblack's chair, smoking a cigar, while his patent leathers were being oiled. He was a finely-built fellow with a heavy black mustache, and his clothes were of the very finest quality, as revealed in the white light of the incandescent lamp above his head.

"That's my man!" cried Bob.

"That's Black Dirk!" hastily scribbled the Man from Wayback.

And then he arose to his feet to get off at the Twentieth-eighth street station. His eyes were blazing and his lips moving, but he spoke not a word.

CHAPTER III.

FROM BROADWAY TO TRAINOR'S.

THEY lost not a moment in leaving the train at Twentieth-eighth street, and hurried down the stairs. The teeth of the Silent Man were set now, and twice he put his hand back to his hip-pocket, as if to make sure his revolver was there.

Down Sixth avenue they went.

"What do you mean to do, mister?" asked Bob, in alarm. "Are yer goin' to shoot?"

Silent Dave did not appear to hear the question, for he made no motion or reply. His eyes were fixed straight ahead for the corner where he had seen Black Dirk sitting in the bootblack's chair.

The corner was reached; but, the chair was empty!

An inarticulate sound—a groan—that indicated disappointment came from the speechless man's lips. He turned helplessly to Bob.

The boy knew what the man wanted, and so caught the negro bootblack by the shoulder saying:

"The last feller what you shined 'em up fer—where'd he go? Speak lively! Here's a dime. Which way?"

The darky was frightened at first, by the manner in which the words were fired at him, but he quickly recovered his composure.

"Big ma-a-n?" he questioned.

"Yes, yes!"

"Silk hat?"

"Yes."

"Black mustache?"

"That's the one."

"Di'mon ring on his lef' han' little finger—big sparkler? Jest kind o' put yer eye out?"

"Yes!"

"Double gold chain 'crost his vest? Nud-der sparkler in his tie? Smokin' black cigar?"

"Yes! Which way?"

"Whatcher want of him, boy?"

"Never mind. Which way did he go?"

"He tipped me a quarter, boy."

"Here's fifteen cents more. Now tell us which direction he took—*lively!*"

"Thank yo'," placidly said the darky, as he pocketed the money. "I didn't notice which way he went, sah. He jest kind o' rambled off somewhar."

And that was all they could get out of him.

They searched for Black Dirk, but not a trace of him did they find that night.

When the hunt was given over, Silent Dave wished to be directed to the Broadway hotel where sporting men were wont most to congregate, and Bob promptly took him to the Tower House. There they obtained a room and registered, the Westerner paying for several days in advance.

That night they made the rounds until a late hour, and then, when they were in their room, they carefully settled their plans. Bob longed to know the reason why the man from Idaho never spoke, but refrained from questioning Silent Dave on that point.

Twice within the next three days the Philadelphia lad saw the man he was after. Each time it happened that Bob was alone and the sport was in a carriage, accompanied by a younger man, so it was impossible to follow him.

On the fourth day, as he was sauntering along Broadway, Bob's eyes fell on this younger man. It was after four o'clock P. M. and just the hour when the most fashionable throng frequents the great thoroughfare of New York from Fourteenth street to Forty-second street.

"Wonder who that chap is?" thought Spotter Bob, as he gazed after the well-dressed young fellow. "He togs right out, anyway. Mebbe he's goin' to meet this Black Dirk? I'll just sneak along."

So he followed the young man, who carried his cane and gloves in his left hand and frequently lifted his hat to ladies of fashionable appearance and spoke to men who were very spruce and correct.

It was not far from Twenty-sixth street that a carriage drew up at the curb, the door opened, and a beautiful young lady stepped daintily out.

The moment the eyes of the man Bob was following rested on this young lady, he hastened forward, exclaiming:

"Miss Noland—Marie!"

"Why, Mr. Steele!" rather impulsively and artlessly cried the girl, as she gave him her gloved hand, over which he bowed with lifted hat. "I scarcely expected to see you to-day. The bank—"

"Closes at three o'clock, you remember. That lets me off and gives me time to reach Upper Broadway thus early."

The young Spotter had not missed a word of this, and it had told him the young man was connected with a bank, in some capacity. He made it his way to stop on the curbing not far from the pair and pretend to be deeply interested in something across the street, but all the while he was drinking in every word uttered.

And it was but a precious few seconds before the boy shadower discovered that the young man and the girl were lovers. More: he learned that the young man was cashier in some bank, of which the girl's father was president.

All this was no business of Bob's, but he was waiting and hoping that something

would be said that would interest him. He was not disappointed.

"Who is that large man of the black mustache that I saw you with at the Casino last evening?" asked the girl.

The young cashier hesitated and looked confused.

"That?" he finally said. "Oh, that was Mr. Walden White, a very fine gentleman."

The girl's lips curled a bit.

"If what I hear of him is true, he *must* be a very fine gentleman!" she said, somewhat scornfully.

"What have you heard?"

"That he is a gambler—a man who follows the races and the faro table."

The young cashier was still more confused.

"Some enemy has been lying about him!" he said, trying to steady his voice. "Mr. White is a gentleman. He is a heavy dealer in real estate. Why, even your father is intimate with him. It was your father who introduced us."

The girl fell back a step, her face paling; then she recovered her composure, to utter a low, musical laugh.

"If this is true, the reports about him must be malicious falsehoods. Yet, papa never spoke to me of him, and I am papa's confidante in almost everything."

"Oh, the man is not in society, although it is possible he might obtain a foothold, for he has many acquaintances of the best sort. I have been to his house, and I assure you he has a most estimable wife and a beautiful little baby girl."

"They can't be speakin' of the man I'm lookin' for," thought the listening boy.

After a minute more of conversation, the young lady entered a jeweler's, while the cashier continued up Broadway. Bob followed the man, not yet having given up hope that they would come upon Black Dirk.

Straight to Trainor's the young cashier led the way. The boy pursued him into the bar-room, and there, sure enough, leaning against the bar, was the very man the lad was looking for!

CHAPTER IV.

A RUFFIAN'S BLOW.

"HELLO, dear boy!" greeted the man of the black mustache, as he grasped the hand of the young man. "You're nearly fifteen minutes late."

"I met Miss Noland on Broadway," was the reply. "I suppose I must have spent nearly fifteen minutes chatting with her."

"Oh, *that's* the way!" laughed he of the mustache, with a leer that seemed vulgar to Bob, youthful as the boy was. "That's the way when you're hard hit! You're bound to sack her, my boy."

The young man's face flushed a bit, as if he did not quite approve of this familiarity, and he suddenly flashed:

"She said something that nearly caused me to break faith with you and not keep this appointment at all."

The other man turned to rest his elbows on the bar, against which his back was leaning, while he elevated his heavy eyebrows, as if quite astounded.

"Indeed!"

That was the only word he uttered, but it was quite enough to express his meaning.

"It is true," declared Steele, half-defiantly, as if he were making an accusation. "She has heard of you."

"Very likely; I know her father, as you are well aware."

"But she never heard of you through him."

"No?"

"Not by any means."

"Then I have friends who have mentioned me to the charming young lady," sneered he of the black mustache, as he knocked flakes

of ashes from the dead cigar in his fingers.

"They were very kind."

"Some one has told her you are a gambler and a scoundrel."

Black Dirk did not start or show any surprise beyond the leisurely uplifting of his heavy eyebrows. If he were not a gambler, he had, beyond a doubt, the kind of nerve every professional gamester requires.

"Very kind of them. I wonder if it has come to such a state that a man cannot venture a little money on the races or take a hand at a quiet game of poker without being dubbed a gambler in this highly moral city?"

He placed the cigar between his white teeth and held it there with a grip that betrayed the fact he felt himself on unsteady ground, even though he seemed quite at ease.

"Well, you see—that is—you know how it is," faltered the young cashier. "People will talk sometimes."

Something like a harsh smile passed like a glint across the graven face of the man against the bar. He saw the situation was not as serious as he had fancied, for Steele had not really taken alarm.

"Let them talk," he said, with a laugh that seemed utterly care-free. "When I am caught cheating or doing something crooked they will have ground. It's a pity if a man can't have a little sport now and then! Why, even you, Willis Steele, might be called a gambler, for you have hit the races now and then, and I hold several of your I. O. U.'s that were taken when you did not have money handy to pay for the fun of a night's session with the boys."

"Sh!" and the younger man's hand fell almost savagely on Black Dirk's arm, while Steele glanced around in alarm. "Don't speak so loud, for God's sake! Remember my position! Why, my head would fall tomorrow if old Roger Noland knew the truth!"

The big man shrugged his shoulders.

"That's just it," he nodded. "As long as a man keeps these little breaks covered, he's all right; but let it be known that he has—"

"I'm going to quit!" interrupted Steele, his voice shaking. "If I don't, I may yet go too far. I don't know but I have gone too far already."

"Too far to quit—yes. You're in debt, and your only way to pull out and keep the thing quiet is to make a winning. You must win now, or lose everything. And you're dead sure to win next round, for I have a straight tip from one of the best touts at the Gut. Mayfair is a positive winner to-morrow, and if I don't pull out \$10,000 on her, I'm a chump. It's a clean walk-away."

"I haven't any money to venture," was the hopeless declaration.

Black Dirk glanced swiftly around from beneath his shaggy brows, and then he softly laughed.

"And you the cashier of a bank!"

At first, Steele did not seem to comprehend the hidden significance of the words, and when he did fully understand them, his face flushed crimson. He seemed on the point of striking the man with whom he was talking, as he grated:

"That's an insult, White! Do you think for a moment I would touch—"

"There, there, there! Don't get excited, my boy! You're the poorest hand to take a joke I ever saw. Of course I don't think anything of the kind, but I couldn't help making a little crack, just to see how it would go with you."

"I trust you are satisfied. It does not go at all, and I'll thank you not to repeat it. I'd blow out my brains before I would resort to that!"

"Of course, of course. You're square as a brick, lad. I've got enough ready cash,

and I'll loan you a couple of hundred for a month or two. You won't need it that long, if you put the pile on Mayfair. You can get odds of thirty to one, and \$200 will bring you in \$6,000 clean. With that you can square every debt, and have enough to face the world once more."

It was a great temptation, as the face of the young man fairly showed, and it did not take the older schemer long to induce Steele to accept the money. There is something about gambling that seems to rob a usually level-headed man of good judgment when he finds himself helplessly behind. He fancies his only hope is to find his money where he lost it, to use a favorite expression of sporting men, and so he takes still more desperate chances, clinging desperately to the wreck and causing it to sink still faster by reason of his mad struggles to get on an even keel.

Willis Steele did not see the gleam of satisfaction in the eyes of the big man when he agreed to take Black Dirk's loan. He was busy writing another I. O. U., and the rascal who pretended to be his friend already held several to which his name was attached, the sums written upon them varying from \$50 to \$300.

After the transaction was completed, the two men had a drink together, Steele taking lemon and soda, and then they sauntered out, brushing against the boy who had heard the greater part of the conversation.

"I twig your little game, or I'm a cod-fish!" was Spotter Bob's mental observation. "I'm enter you bigger'n an elifunt! You're workin' to git the young cove tangled all up, an' then you're goin' to use him dirty somehow. Mebbe it goes; but I'll bet odds it don't. I'm a Rogue-Crusher from Crusher-ville, an' I'll trip you up somehow. First thing is to make a break at you and see how fast you can lie."

Barely had the two men reached the street when Black Dirk felt a hand on his arm and turned to see a boyish face at his elbow.

"Scuse me, mister," said Bob; "but I'd kinder like to know where I can find my sister."

The man halted in surprise. Dirk shook off the hand, saying harshly:

"What's that? Your sister? How do you suppose I know anything about your sister?"

"But you do know, just ther same! I saw you ridin' in the Park with her. Her name is Jessie Braddock."

"Riding in the Park with your sister? You're crazy! I am a married man, and—"

"I saw ye! You can't fool this chap! I have come from Phillydelfy to find her, an' you're goin' to tell me where she is."

"But I tell you I'm married! I—"

"That don't make no difference in your case. You hain't too good for any double game, Mr. Black Dirk."

Nervy man though he was, the rascal turned pale as he heard the boy address him thus. He fell back a step.

"Black Dirk!"

"That's what they call ye out in Idaho," cheerfully assured Bob. "You've got a smutty rep out there, and I advise this young feller to look sharp or you'll do him dirt. If—"

With a fierce exclamation of rage, the infuriated man launched his heavy right fist. The blow caught the boy fairly, and it made poor Bob see stars.

CHAPTER V.

TRACKED TO HARLEM.

THE boy was knocked down in an instant, and, for some moments, he lay stunned on the sidewalk.

Willis Steele uttered an exclamation of astonishment and resentment as he witnessed the blow, and the man of the black mustache seemed shocked by his own act.

"I didn't mean to do it," he asserted; "but I couldn't take that guff. I forgot he was a boy. Guess he's all right. Come on, Steele."

He took hold of the cashier's arm and they walked rapidly across the avenue to the stairs of the Elevated Station. By the time they were half-way over, Bob was on his feet and looking around for them. A crowd had gathered around him with astonishing quickness, but he slipped through the little knot and ran across the street, gaining the other side quite as soon as the men he was following. He saw Black Dirk look back, but he was sure the man did not see him, and he took good care to fall back and keep out of sight.

Willis Steele and the man of the black mustache stood in earnest conversation for some moments, and then they parted, Steele turning down Broadway.

Bob had anticipated the movements of Black Dirk, and the shrewd young fakir was already skipping up the flight of stairs leading to the Elevated Station on the lower side.

Knowing the man might look back to discover if he was followed the sharp lad ventured a hazard that Dirk would take the first Harlem train, and so he reached the station first. He lost not a second in bolting into the waiting-room, where he peered from the window, eagerly watching for his man.

"If I'm wrong, I'll go take a soak off the dock," muttered Bob. "But Steele don't go up on the L, cause he—cause he—well, cause he don't. Dunno why I think so, but it's something in the cut of his jib. One of 'em was goin' to take the train, else why did he stop to chin at the foot of the stairs. If Steele don't go, then it must be—*There he is!*"

Black Dirk came hurrying out on the platform just as the chopper cried:

"Harlem train—Harlem!"

The man glanced up and down, and then he made for the train. There was a jam aboard and he had some difficulty about getting a foothold inside the gate.

Bob was not to be left. That would not be "business," and he was business to the tips of his fingers. Out of the waiting-room he darted, and he was able to worm his way upon another car.

But he could not watch his man from that position and so he was able to tell where Black Dirk got off. Knowing the man would not bother to ride on a crowded Harlem train unless he was going further than 50th street, the boy did not hurry about making his way to a point where he could watch Dirk. Gradually and deliberately, he worked down through the crowded car, and by the time Fifty-ninth street was reached he had his eyes glued on the owner of the black mustache.

"This is when I know just where you hang out, honey," thought the shrewd shadow. "You're a villain, and I know it. I'll git square for that rap in the jaw, or my name's Cold Molasses."

Passengers began to get off at every station after Fifty-ninth street was passed, and with the thinning out it became more difficult for Bob to keep out of sight. A large number left the train at 116th street, and the boy jammed himself down in a corner, keeping an eye on his game, who, strangely enough, still remained on the platform.

At 125th street Black Dirk left the train and hurried toward the stairs. The guard snapped the gate closed before Bob could get off.

"Hey, there!" called the boy, seeing Dirk disappearing; "lemme out!"

"Too late."

The guard had pulled the cord as a signal to go ahead.

"Gottar git off!" protested the boy shadow.

"Mighty important business, an' my name's

business straight from the shoulder. Jerk open the flange an' permit me to dismount."

"Get into the car and sit down! You can get off at next stop."

The train started.

"Take me for a snoozer?" cried Bob.

"I've got wings. See me soar!"

Over the gate he went at a leap, striking lightly on his feet on the platform of the station.

"Hey, chopper!" yelled the guard. "See that kid? Grab him!"

"Well, I should smile!" chuckled the nimble lad. "It takes something quicker than a crab to pinch me. Ketch onto my motion. It's great."

Like a monkey he slipped past the chopper's outstretched hand and fled down the stairs.

He was not pursued.

"That's what I like," smiled Spotter Bob, as he bounded down the steps and reached the street. "I can feed on excitement. This is the right kind of a town for me. Phillydelfy ain't in it after this."

He looked around for his man and was just in time to see him turning along the street toward the east. Then it was not a hard task for him to shadow Dirk.

Straight to a very fashionable apartment building the boy tracked his man, and he saw the bell Dirk rung. When the owner of the black mustache had disappeared, the young shadow walked boldly forward and looked at the name over the bell. It was:

"WALDEN WHITE."

"That's what the young feller called him when the girl asked who he was," thought Bob; "so that must be the title he sports in this town. Walden White! What a name for a rascal, and rascal he is, or I'm a chumpy-chump. Well, I wonder what I can discover about Mr. Walden White."

He looked around for information, and, just then, the negro janitor of the place came out. The darkey surveyed Bob in a mighty patronizing way, as he pompously inquired:

"W'at yo' want, boy?"

The young Rogue-Crusher, as Bob sometimes called himself, took off his hat and bowed profoundly, a look of awe and reverence on his face, as he deferentially asked:

"Are you the owner of this building?"

The negro looked suspiciously at the boy, as if to discover whether he was being guyed or not, but the young fakir's face was perfectly grave and solemn, as if he were in sober earnest.

"Why, no, suh," answered the janitor, swelling with importance; "not edactly de ownah, suh, but—"

"Then you must be a still more important personage. Is—is it possible you are—the janitor?"

The question was asked with bated breath and an appearance of the greatest awe. The negro grew two inches in less than half a minute.

"Yes, suh, I am de janitor, suh."

"Then you run the ranch, of course. I am proud to know you. The janitors are monarchs in this town, and that by a large majority. I trust you will not be offended, oh, mighty sir, if I venture to ask you a few humble questions concerning one of your tenants?"

"Dat's all right, boy; only don' tek up too much ob my vallyubul time. Watcher want to know, suh?"

"Would you be condescending enough to inform me who this Mr. Walden White is?"

"Him? Why, dat man's rich—in de real estate business. Gives de larges' tips ob any man in de house. He's a corker, dat man is!"

"How long has he lived here?"

"Eight months—mos' nine."

"Many thanks, noble sir. Has he a family, forsooth?"

"Fam'ly fer soup? W'ot yo' talkin' 'bout, boy? He's married—got a wife an' leetle gel."

"Accept my gratitude for your kindness in responding. You're a daisy, Abraham."

"My name ain't Abr'um. Don't git fresh, kid!"

Bob made another humble bow.

"Your pardon, Sir Knight. It was lapsus lingo—slip of the tongue. Excuse my Latin. I learned it when I was in France the last time, and it will occasionally slip out, the best I can do. Speaking about tips, here's a quarter. Is Mr. White much away from home?"

The janitor accepted the quarter as if he were doing Bob a favor, but he continued to answer the questions promptly.

"Yes, suh; he spend a gre't deal ob his time away—speshully nights. Sometime he don' come in tell atter I open up in de mawnin'."

"Business presses him, without doubt. How old is his wife?"

"'Bout thirty, suh."

"Is she tall, slim and dark?"

"No; she am rudder short, fat an' light."

"How old is the little girl?"

"'Bout t'ree year, suh."

"Among their visitors do you ever notice a young lady of about twenty who is tall, slim and dark?"

"Dey nebber hab no visitors, sur. Mrs. White am an invalid, an' she don' go no-where nor recelbe callers no moah."

Bob pressed his lips together and for a moment a look rested on his face that made him appear much older than he actually was. All the frivolity had vanished before the passing cloud, and the anxiety that had been seen so long gnawing at his heart triumphed for the time. The negro was shrewd enough to see this, and he asked:

"Am there sufflin' worryin' yo', boy?"

In a flash the cloud on Bob's face was gone.

"There am," declared the boy. "I have fallen heir to seventeen blocks on Broadway, and I must dispose of them before noon tomorrow in order to raise enough cash to settle my last winter's coal bill. I was simply investigating the standing of Mr. White to make sure he was responsible before I opened negotiations with him. You have relieved my mind greatly, most exalted sir, and I thank you with tears of gratitude in my mind. Good-day, Sambo."

Having insulted the dignity of the janitor with this plebeian name, Bob turned and sauntered away.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MEETING OF FRIENDS.

REGARDLESS of the fact that he had aroused the anger of the dignified black man, Spotter Bob crossed the street and passed to look up at the apartment building.

"So that is where you live, Mr. Walden White, otherwise known as Black Dirk, gambler and desperado! I have tracked you to your hole, but I have not found my sister. I take it you have the reputation of being a very moral man, and doubtless you are highly respected. Money will buy respect in most cases. You know where my sister is, and I am going to know before I am a great deal older."

"But Silent Dave is the cove what gets me, an' he gets me *bad*. What's his lay?—what's he want of Black Dirk? He's from the West, and they shoot mighty handy out there, I've heerd. If I ain't a codfish, I saw shoot in his eyes when we spotted Dirk in the bootblack's chair on Sixth avenue. Shouldn't wonder if my pal had taken an oath never to speak another word until he wiped out Dirky."

The thought came to Bob like a revelation, for it explained the singular silence of the mysterious man from Idaho, a silence that

had seem unaccountable so long as the man could hear and understand perfectly.

The more the boy shadow thought it over the stronger became his conviction that he had hit upon the truth. If he were right, there was a chance that Silent Dave would do something desperate when he came face to face with Black Dirk.

"If he should down Dirk, how'd I ever find my sister?" was the question Bob asked himself. "Here he's hired me at two dollars a day to help him find this man, and now I've found him, I s'pose I oughter do the square thing and say so. I'm in a box, an' I dunno how to git out."

The situation puzzled the boy a great deal, for he was square as a brick and could not think of doing anything that was not perfectly white. It is a rare thing to find a city lad, bred in the streets, who has a high idea of honor, but when one is found, he is honest to the bone.

After a time, Bob decided to "let up" on Black Dirk for that night, as it would not now be difficult to find him any time, and return to the hotel, where he could talk it over with Dave. That is, he would do the talking, while his partner replied with gesture and an occasionally written word.

Shortly after arriving at this decision, Bob was on the L riding down-town.

It was now dark and the street lights glimmered to the east from the road curve below One-hundred and-sixteenth street like a great swarm of fire flies. Away over toward the East Side the whole top of a building was encircled by a glare of electric lights that caused the young fakir to believe it must be a roof garden or theater of some kind.

The boy's head was busy with schemes, and he scarcely noted the flight of time until Twenty eighth street was reached. There he left the train, intending to proceed straight to the Tower House.

As he reached the foot of the Elevated stairs he suddenly drew back, repressing an exclamation.

Budge Farrel was passing.

"Wouldn't Dave like to get after him?" thought the young Rogue-Crusher. "Wonder if he hangs out over that way?"

Farrel had turned to the west along Twenty-eighth street.

For a moment Bob was undecided, and then he muttered:

"I might be able to track him to his bungalow, so here goes. It's well enough to know where these chickens roost."

He promptly started to follow the thug.

Farrel was swinging along at a good pace, his head down, as if deeply in thought, and Bob did not think there was much danger the ruffian would discover he was followed.

They soon passed dark and silent houses—houses which would be brilliantly lighted after eleven o'clock, and from which would issue the sound of mirthless laughter and lascivious music. Till the break of another day would these sounds continue, and yet blue coats and brass buttons were to be seen occasionally patrolling the street.

Beyond Eighth avenue, the cosmopolitan thoroughfare of New York, hurried Budge Farrel. The section he entered rapidly grew squalid and vile. The street was badly lighted, and the dark figures slinking along the pave were far from reassuring.

In the shadows of the street Bob lost sight of his man. He hastened forward and ran straight into Farrel's clutch.

"So-so, ye little devil!" grated the thug, as he fastened his horny hands on the boy's throat. "Ye t'ought yer'd foller me, eh? Well, I twigged yer little game from der start. I've got a bone ter pick wid youse, an' I'm jest goin' ter break der face of ye! You stuck yer nose in my dish oncet, an' I never fergit any'ting like dat. See if dis breaks yer jaw."

Then he hit Bob a terrible blow on the side of the head—a blow that nearly stunned

the reckless lad. The young fakir cried out with pain and rage and fought with all his strength.

"No yer don't!" evilly chuckled the king.

"I'll pound der life out of ye dis time!"

But he did not strike Bob again.

"Drop him, you coward!"

The words sounded close at hand, and, a moment later, the boy was forcibly torn from Farrel's grasp. Then the ruffian received a punch behind the ear that sent him reeling and staggering against some stone steps, over upon which he toppled.

With an angry snarl, he leaped to his feet, his hand disappearing under his coat, as he faced the new-comer on the scene.

"Look out!" gasped Bob. "He's goin' to pull a knife or a pistol!"

"On me! Well, I should smile!"

The individual who had so fortunately come to Bob's assistance leaped like a flash at Budge, grasping the ruffian's wrists. With a jerk and a twist, he baffled the desperado's intention and gave Farrel such a shock that a snarl of fury was wrung from the thug's lips.

For a few moments, there was a desperate battle, but Farrel was no match for his opponent, and he was fairly knocked senseless into the gutter.

"Come on," advised the victor, turning to Bob. "He isn't hurt any to speak of. It takes more than a thumping to injure his kind. Let's get away from this locality."

"Mister," cried the young fakir, in admiration. "You're a holy terror on skates! Who be ye? Seems to me your voice sounds natural, but I—"

"And you! Great Scott! Can it be—it is—Bob Braddock!"

"Sure! An' you—"

"Don't you know me, Bob?"

"Holy smokes! Frank Anson!"

"Right!"

The delight of the man and the boy at meeting thus was unbounded.

"Why," cried Bob, "I t'ought you was in Phillydelfy!"

"Been in New York for a week."

"I've been here two."

"What doing?"

"Same old racket—faking. Selling collar-buttons an' cuff-supporters one day, combination jack knives the next, double action screw-drivers the next, an' so on."

"Full of business, as ever!"

"That's what."

"You'll get on anywhere."

"I'll try it, Frank. But what be you doin' here?"

They had reached Eighth avenue and halted on the corner. Anson, who was a tall, finely-formed young man with a smooth-shaved face, hesitated about answering.

"Well, you see, Bob, I'm on business, too."

The boy was not satisfied.

"What kind of business?"

"I'm looking after somebody."

A sudden light of comprehension flitted across the young fakir's face.

"You don't mean—"

"I mean—"

"Jessie?"

"Yes."

They looked into each other's faces, regardless of the passing throng of people weaving restlessly beneath the white light of the lamps. The boy was the first to speak.

"Who made you come?"

"Your mother wanted me to."

"You have found—what?"

"Nothing."

"Not a trace of her?"

"No."

"Where have you looked?"

"At all the theaters from the Bowery to Harlem."

"She is not there."

"But she wrote—"

"Jessie told no falsehoods in the old days,

but she ran away from her home. Her life has been different since then. She wanted us to think she was getting on. Is it strange she should have said she was doing well?"

The boy spoke with the earnestness and gravity of a man now, all his flippancy having disappeared, as it always did when his wayward sister was mentioned.

Frank Anson listened with a look of pain on his plain face. He was built like an Apollo, but his features were anything but regular or handsome. His dress was plain and a close observer would have easily spotted him for a man who did heavy day labor in order to earn his living. In fact, he was a blacksmith by trade, and a good one. He had a fairly good education, was gentlemanly by nature, but, above all, was all the way through a man.

Once Jessie Braddock had thought Frank Anson the best fellow in the world, and he had almost worshiped her. That was before her head was filled with foolish notions of the stage and she began to long for the fine clothes and jewels her father was unable to buy for her. Then she grew cold toward Frank, although she never fully cast him over until she ran away. Then she wrote him a heartless letter, saying she would never see him again.

For a little time, Frank seemed crushed by the blow, for Jessie had promised to become his wife. But he had a strong heart, and he went about his work resolutely, seeking in that manner to gain forgetfulness. He continued a visitor at the home of the Braddocks, where he was always welcomed warmly, being a great favorite with Jessie's mother.

Frank had pride, and, despite his great love for Jessie, which her cruel letter had not entirely crushed, he would never have followed her but for Mrs. Braddock. After Bob's going away in search of the lost one, the lonely mother grew still more lonely and desperate. It seemed that her daughter must be brought back to her arms before she died. Then she urged Frank to go to New York and aid Bob in the search.

Frank came, but Bob moved about so much he could not trace the boy. Then he took up the search all alone, living in cheap rooms on the West Side. Chance had brought the man and the boy together.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN WITHOUT A TONGUE.

"You mean that she has not been upon the stage at all since coming to New York?" questioned Frank.

Bob nodded.

"Then how has she lived?" cried the startled blacksmith.

"Don't ask me."

The boy's eyes were on the pavement.

All at once, Anson caught Bob by both shoulders, crying harshly:

"Good God! You don't mean that?"

Again the young fakir did not speak.

"Tell me you don't mean it!" panted Frank, his face pale. "Why—why, she's your own sister!"

"I don't know what ye're talkin' about," came sullenly from Bob's lips. "I ain't said that I meant anything. What's eatin' you, anyhow?"

The young blacksmith choked as his hand fell from the boy's shoulder, for Bob had not answered the question. Instead, the lad had avoided it by this sudden glint of defiance, as if Anson were a foe who had no right to question, instead of a friend, ready to fight for his friends.

"She must have lived somehow," murmured Frank, as if speaking to himself.

"Of course."

"But how?"

"S'pose she'll tell us when we find her."

"We may never find her."

"Yep we will."

"You are confident."

"Have reasons."

"How is that?"

"I know a feller that'll take me to her."

"Then you have traced her?"

"Sure."

"Where is she?"

"Can't just tell yet, but I'll know pretty soon. Saw her riding in the Park t'other day." Then Bob paused and bit his lips, as if angry with himself for saying so much. As he feared, Anson caught it up:

"Riding in the Park?"

"Yes."

"Who with?"

The blacksmith's voice was hoarse and unsteady, as if he was trying to hold in check powerful emotions. Bob fully understood all the luckless lover was suffering.

"With a friend."

"A friend!" groaned Anson. "What friends can a lone girl make in a city like this! It is worse than I feared!"

"Now don't go ter sloppin' over!" was the boy's prompt advice. "I didn't say she was with a man friend. It was a mighty fine rig they had, an' I s'pose likely Jess has gone to be the companion of some rich woman. That's all right, though she'd be so thunderin' proud she never'd let us know she'd slumped on the stage racket and had to play the maid. See how it is?"

Frank Anson drew a long breath, color and hope slowly coming back to his face. He grasped Bob's hand, speaking brokenly:

"For Heaven's sake forget that I ever thought bad of Jessie! I didn't—I couldn't believe it! But you—your manner—"

"Can't always size up a feller's thinks by the look on his mug," said Bob, who had not said he saw his sister riding with a woman in the Park, but was glad Frank took it that way. "Mebbe I was tryin' you—"

"It isn't like you, Bob?"

"Well, I wasn't. Let it drop, anyway. I owe you a heap for knockin' out that tough an' savin' me a broken head. He had it in for me."

"What for?"

"Oh, I spoiled a little racket of his the other day—kept him from flinging a man off an Elevated train. I socked him on the hash-trap, and it popped him right plump over. He didn't like it much, an' so he was goin' in bigger'n an elephant to git square."

"Well, I gave him something he'll remember awhile. Where are you stopping, Bob?"

"Hangin' out at a swell hotel on Broadway. Oh, I'm one of the bloods, bet yer diamond stud! Right in the midst of bloods. It's great!"

"What's your object?"

"I'm paid by the day. Just goin' to see my boss when I run inter Budge Farrel an' tried to shadow him to his coop. He got on to my little game, an' then he got onto me. Reckon I'll go report to my boss. Come along?"

"No. This rig isn't quite the thing for a swell hotel, and I'm too tired to walk far. Been tramping all day. Come to my room at nine in the morning, will you? Here's my address. I want to talk it all over with you. We ought to be able to work better together. I shall write your mother to-night that I have met you."

A few minutes later they parted, each going his way.

Bob found Silent Dave alone in a room of the Tower House. The mysterious man was pacing up and down like a caged tiger, a terrible look on his face. He wheeled on Bob as a startled animal wheels on the hunter, but made a gesture of satisfaction when he saw who had entered thus unceremoniously.

The boy had been unable to fathom his singular employer, for the moods of the Silent Man were many and shifting. The look on his face expressed his feelings as plainly as words could have done, and it was an easy

thing to tell when he was dangerous, as he certainly was occasionally.

The boy spotter felt that Silent Dave had been greatly wronged at some past period of his life, but he knew it would not do to pry into the man's secrets when he was in anything but the most agreeable frame of mind. Even then, a reference to the past might arouse the slumbering devil within him.

Immediately understanding Dave's condition, Bob made no remark, simply greeting his employer with a nod, which was returned. Then the boy flung himself into a chair, as if very tired, which was simulation on his part.

For ten minutes, perhaps, the man who did not speak paced the room. Toward the last, he grew less excited, and he finally paused before his boy helper, pad and pencil in hand. He wrote:

"What luck?"

Bob shifted uneasily in his seat, but finally braced himself to say:

"What if I've found his hole?"

In a moment a clutch of iron was on his shoulder and two gleaming eyes glared into his own. An instant Silent Dave remained thus, as if trying to read the lad's thoughts, then he straightened up to write:

"He is mine—his life—his heart's blood! Where is he?"

"Now, I didn't say I had found his hole, so—"

He was interrupted by an inarticulate sound—a sound that expressed both disappointment and anger. Dave made a fierce gesture that plainly said:

"Don't tamper with me!"

"Look here," resolutely said Bob, "I was after this feller at the first start, though I didn't know it when I made the trade to aid you. All I want of him is to find my sister, an' I believe he knows where she is. After I have found her, you are welcome to your man. If you get at him before that time, I may never find Jessie. See? You can wait a day or two—"

"And let him take the alarm! He'll escape me! Stand by your bargain!"

"I mean to stand by my bargain," declared the boy, when he had read the hastily written words. "I never went back on my promise yet. But I want you to give me a little more time. If I do not find my sister within three days, I'll agree to point out your man. I don't know what he ever did to you, but I reckon you've got a big score ag'in' him."

The Silent Man's face worked convulsively and he tore at the collar of his shirt, as if it were difficult for him to breathe. The boy was frightened, but he did not show it outwardly.

Seeming unable to conquer his emotions, Dave turned and walked the length of the room again. Bob lounged in the chair and watched his mysterious companion, feeling cold chills traverse his spine, for there was certainly something uncanny about this queer human being who never spoke a word though he were eating his heart out with fury.

When Dave paused again he was apparently calm.

"I had a sister," he wrote. "This man destroyed her life!"

"That's his little game, ev'ry time."

"You hope to save your sister?"

"I do. Promise to give me three days, and I will take you to him. If you do not promise, I must throw up the whole business right here, all for my own sister's sake."

Silent Dave fought a battle with himself. Once he turned to the boy and held out his hands imploringly, but Bob shook his head with firmness.

"At the end of three days, you will allow me this man?" was the question he wrote.

"If you promise."

"You can do it?"

"Yes."

"I promise."

To Bob's own astonishment, he had triumphed, and he drew a long breath of relief. If he could not find Jessie in three days, he would keep his pledge; but he believed Black Dirk would lead him to the runaway girl.

"You must hate this man heaps," he observed, curiously. "Did you swear never to talk till you ketched him?"

The Silent Man's hand flashed across the pad, and he wrote one word:

"Look!"

He pointed at his mouth. Bob arose and looked, as directed. Dave opened his mouth, and the boy uttered a cry of horror that was literally wrung from him by what he saw.

The Man from Idaho had no tongue! It had been cut off clean at the roots!

Little wonder he never spoke!

CHAPTER VIII.

PLAYING THE SHADOW.

FOR two days Bob shadowed his man without succeeding in his purpose. It seemed that Mr. Walden White suspected he was watched and took especial care to baffle the boy. This was not really true, but that made no difference so long as the man did not lead the young fakir to the missing girl.

Bob played his part well, sometimes appearing as a youth bubbling over with business, having a strong desire to sell patent collar-buttons and cuff-supporters, and sometimes seeming to be nothing more than a worthless young loafer whose only care was to "sneak" a "butt" from the gutter and smoke it on some comfortable corner.

Once or twice he saw Frank Anson, but it was only for a moment. Anson wanted to assist him, but Bob knew better than to have it, so he went it alone, which was much better and safer.

Silent Dave seemed to regret his promise, although he did not say as much outright; but he did say he would quite forget his boy assistant were he to meet his old enemy face to face. Bob expected that, so it did not worry him at all. His only fear was that the three days would expire before he had accomplished his purpose, and he would find it necessary to keep his word to the man without a tongue.

Bob never thought of Silent Dave's misfortune without a shudder of horror. What a terrible thing it was to have no tongue! He wondered how the man had lost it, but never had he possessed courage to ask. Something in the mysterious man's manner forbade questions on that point; but the young shadow knew well enough Black Dirk was responsible for it all.

What would happen when the two men stood face to face? The young Spotter asked himself the question scores of times, and when he remembered the Silent Man's looks at the mere mention of Black Dirk, he trembled.

Would it be right to bring the two men together? Bob had not thought of that at first, but now it was troubling him. A terrible tragedy might follow such a meeting, in which case, would he not be responsible in a measure?

The boy's position was peculiar and trying. He could not tell his story to the police without being laughed at, he feared, and even if they listened seriously, it would be like turning traitor to Silent Dave. This he could not think of, for it was not in his nature to betray an honest man.

That Dave's grievance could not be adjusted by the law, Bob well realized. It was something beyond courts of justice. The interference of the law would simply work to the advantage of the black-hearted villain who deserved punishment, as it was quite probable Silent Dave would be arrested as a dangerous character.

The Man from 'Wayback carried concealed

weapons, as Bob was well aware, and were he to be searched by the police, that would count against him.

The boy could not quite wash his hands of all responsibility, no matter what happened. Even though Black Dirk richly deserved any fate that might befall him, Bob did not like to feel that he had aided in bringing retribution down upon him.

But Bob was most eager to find his lost sister. For all of the fact that Dirk did not immediately lead him to the missing girl, he still believed the rascal knew where Jessie was to be found.

One night Bob followed the man to a saloon on Eighth avenue, where all kinds of resorts are to be found. There was a bower of trees, cedar and fir, in little tubs arranged on the walk, with chairs and round tables amid them, where beer could be served. The hour was early, and it happened no customers were sitting around the tables when Dirk arrived. Nevertheless, he chose the most secluded nook and sat down all alone. Bob wondered what was up.

The waiter brought the man of the black mustache a beer, but it was allowed to sit untasted on the table until the foam fell and the tiny beads ceased to dance in the glass, which indicated it had grown "flat."

Then another man came and sat down opposite Black Dirk.

The boy started when he saw this man, for it was the thug known as Budge Farrel.

The way in which the two men shook hands showed they were on a level, and Black Dirk sunk several points in the boy shadow's estimation.

The "flat" beer was sent away by the waiter, who was instructed to fill two more glasses and bring cigars. He obeyed, and the two men were soon smoking comfortably, while they chatted over their beer, with their heads close together.

Then Bob was seized by a desire to hear what they had to say, and he lost no time in getting as near as possible without being observed. This did not prove difficult, and, in a few seconds, a slight screen of bushes alone separated him from the plotters.

But when that point was reached, to his disgust, Bob found he could not hear all that was being said. He feared he would miss something important, and that made him venturesome.

Two of the little tubs in which trees were planted were far enough apart so the boy fancied he might be able to creep through between them. Where he was, the light of a street lamp fell full upon him, and the policeman on the next corner might grow suspicious were he to remain there too long.

So, selecting a moment when the policeman's attention was attracted another way and no one seemed to be observing him, Bob flattened himself on the stones and crept through the opening with the swiftness and silence of a squirming snake.

Inside, the boy found himself right under the table at which the men sat. He found it necessary to take care he did not strike against their feet or legs and thus alarm them.

And he could hear their words.

"I played my game fer all it was wort', boss," Budge Farrel declared. "He never took a tumble, an' I'd dumped him inter destreet but fer de kid I was tellin' ye of."

"Hang that kid!" grated Black Dirk. "I reckon he is the one who gave me such a going over before Steele. But I fixed him! I gave him a lifter!"

"He's a tough nut," nodded the thug. "I rapped him hard in de jaw der odder night, but t'ree fellers jumped me an' he got erway while I was doin' up der gang."

"I don't care for the kid, but I do care for this cursed silent sleuth-hound! That man must be put out of the way by hook or crook Farrel!"

"Tain't no easy job."

"I told you that in the first place. He's a fighter, though what he has been through ought to have taken the gyp out of him some. But he can shoot like a devil, and he'd as quick use his guns as his fists. It wouldn't make a particle of difference to him about being in an Eastern city. If he wanted to shoot, he'd shoot. And I believe he has sworn to take a crack at me on sight."

"Dat's agreeable."

"I don't care to take chances, though I shall fight if we meet. Still, I had a great deal rather we wouldn't meet. That's why I wanted you to do him for me. Now, I am going to offer greater inducements. I'll add two hundred more to my offer if you'll bring me proof before Saturday night that you have downed the whelp for good and all. What do you say to that?"

"He's a corker."

"Well?"

"Make it three hundred—"

"It's a go, but not another cent. You say you know where he is stopping?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"Tower House."

"You'll have to get him out of that locality to do the work."

"Trust dat to me. Fork over fifty to bind der bargain."

"Not a cent. You know that I will keep my word when the work is done. I gave you fifty in the first place, and that goes."

Farrel growled a great deal at this, but the chief villain could not be moved.

The boy under the table shivered as he heard this deliberate, cold-blooded plot to commit murder—a bargain for a human life! Still, he was nifty enough to keep his place, even though he well knew what would befall him if he were discovered and captured by the ruffians.

"Speakin' of Steele," said Budge, how are you comin' on wid him?"

"Fairly. I've got a double-cinch grip on the poor fool, and I'll turn on the power by and by. I hold I. O. U.'s enough with his name attached to ruin him, and—"

"You're workin' ter git at der bank?"

"Sh! Lower! Of course. I'll get him where he'll have to hit the bank, and I'll gather a goodly share of the proceeds to myself. If possible, I want to work the game so he'll skip to Canada and all the suspicion will fall on him. If that can't be done, then the bank shall be cracked, and you and I'll do the job. We can do the outside work all right, if I can get the combination out of the fool."

"I wonder if anybody could hear what we are saying if they were on the other side of these shrubs?"

With that, he parted the bushes and peered through. He saw no one.

But, at that very instant, Farrel moved and struck his foot fairly against the boy under the table.

"Hello!" he said, growlingly. "What's dat I hit?"

CHAPTER IX.

THE TRAGEDY OF THE FLAT.

"CAUGHT!"

Spotter Bob very nearly uttered the word aloud, as his heart leaped into his mouth.

What could he do?

He knew what to expect from the hands of the two miscreants should they get hold of him, and he was frightened. Budge Farrel was black-hearted for any act, and, knowing the boy had overheard their plotting, the thug would be desperate and furious.

Something must be done, and not an instant was to be wasted.

The young shadow wasted no time. Like an eel, he squirmed backward, feet foremost through the opening that had admitted him

to the place where he had overheard the rascals' schemes.

None too soon.

Farrel kicked out again, but failed to hit Bob's head by less than an inch. Then the ruffian pushed back from the table to peer underneath.

Fortunately, a deep shadow lay beneath the table, and Budge did not catch more than a glimpse of Bob's head as it disappeared between the tubs.

"What was it?" questioned Black Dirk, looking downward in a vain attempt to see anything at all.

"A dog," replied Budge, who had mistaken the vanishing head for a cur.

Both men breathed with relief.

As for Bob, he could scarcely realize he had escaped detection thus easily, and he remained crouching outside the line of shrub trees, his heart pounding violently in his breast. As he lingered there, he heard Budge say:

"How's der little fairy on Twenth-fourth street? Thought you were goin' ter take a feller round?"

"She's all right," replied Dirk; "only she's a terrible spit-fire. I don't believe she'd take to you for a cent, Farrel."

"T'ought youse wanted ter give her de shake?"

"So I do, but it is not an easy thing. I'm in deep there. Well, this town is getting pretty hot for me, anyway, and I'll have to skip directly."

Bob saw a policeman approaching, and, after pretending to be searching for a "butt," he straightened up and sauntered away.

Not far. He paused where he could watch the shrubs and see the men when they left the place, taking care that he was where neither of them would be liable to observe him.

In about ten minutes, the two men came out upon the sidewalk. They did not pause to utter any farewells, but separated at once.

There was a feeling of elation and eagerness in Bob's heart, for something seemed to tell him his time was near at hand. He promptly started to shadow the chief rascal of the two.

Black Dirk sauntered along the avenue, smoking his black cigar, until he came to Twenty-fourth street, into which he turned.

Spotter Bob was not far away.

The boy little realized he was also being followed, but such was the case. Budge Farrel did not know exactly where Dirk kept the "fairy" of whom he had spoken, and thereupon decided to dog the man to his destination. It did not take him long to find out the young fakir was also on the scent.

"Dash me eyes!" grated the thug, peering keenly at the lad. "Dat's der same kid! He turns up ev'rywhere. Wonder what he's at now?"

He quickly discovered that the young shadower was tracking Black Dirk, and that fairly aroused the ruffian's rage.

"If dat kid ain't put out of der way, he's goin' ter do us hurt," muttered the ex-convict. "I'll jest have to give him a tap on de knob."

He was very cautious in following Bob, knowing he would slip up if the lad took the alarm.

In the mean time, the young shadow was paying strict attention to Black Dirk, for he felt that everything depended on his success that night. Something made him understand the man would lead him to his sister then, and the opportunity of tracking him thus again might never occur.

"Only one more day of grace before I have to put Silent Dave on," was his mental remark. "I don't think I'll need that extra day. I'm pretty sure to find Jessie this night."

At length Dirk flung away the butt of his cigar and ascended the steps of a flat-house. He glanced around as he did so, but he only saw a boy slouching along with his hands in his pockets and his hat over his eyes, while further down a drunken man was taking nearly the whole sidewalk.

The boy was Bob, and the drunken man was Budge Farrel, who was never soberer in all his life.

Bob was directly opposite the door of the house when Dirk rung a bell, and thus the shrewd young shadower was able to see which button was pushed.

"First floor, right," flashed through Bob's head.

There was a click at the door, which swung open, and then the man walked in and disappeared.

"Holed!" softly cried the boy, cutting a pigeon's wing on the sidewalk. "How slick!"

The man who appeared to be intoxicated reeled up and staggered against the lad.

"Luff, ye lubber!" exclaimed Bob, good-naturedly. "You're on the wrong tack. Trim up, get into the wind and steer straight ahead. You've run down enough schooners for one night."

Then, all at once, the man straightened up and grabbed the boy and snarled:

"I'll fix yer dis time!"

"Taken so by surprise, Bob didn't have time to dodge the blow that was aimed at his head. He was struck fairly with something heavy, and he dropped limp and motionless in the grasp of the thug.

"Dat's der time I did him!" chuckled the brute. "One crack was enough."

He shook the lad, but the limp figure did not stir. Bob's eyes were closed, and he did not seem to breathe.

"Well, I must 'a' hit him a jolly one! He's white as a stiff. Got it right close ter de temple. Hope I didn't split his skull. Don't want him ter croak on my account, though I did feel like givin' him a good biff. Dished if he don't look like he *had* croaked!"

Budge glanced nervously around to see if he was observed, and then he carried the unconscious lad from the front of the house to a spot where the light was not so bright. There he shook Bob roughly, saying:

"Come, come! Don't try ter play dat on me! I know yer game."

But still the boy did not stir.

All at once, Budge noticed a dark stain that was creeping down the side of the lad's face. He started, touched it and drew back with a growl.

"It's blood!"

Yes; it was blood, and the brutal thug began to be alarmed lest he had killed Bob with one blow. Up and down the street he glanced, and a smothered curse broke from his lips as he saw a policeman slowly approaching beneath a distant street lamp.

Flinging the motionless body of the unconscious boy up against the base of the iron fence, Farrel hastened from the spot.

If the policeman had walked straight along, he must have seen the luckless lad, but his attention was attracted across the street, and he went over. So it came about that the victim of Farrel's brutality lay unnoticed by the fence. Several persons passed, but Bob was in the shadow, and, if they saw him at all, they took him for a drunken person.

For almost thirty minutes Bob lay there, and then he opened his eyes and stirred, uttering a groan. He was dazed, but he finally sat up, muttering:

"Was it a house that fell on me? Feels like my nut is cracked wide open. What did happen?"

It took him some minutes to gather his wits, and even then he was like a person with his mind befogged. He knew he had been struck down by Farrel, and he fancied

it was all a part of Black Dirk's plan to get him out of the way.

"But I ain't dead—not much!" came through his clinched teeth, as he drew himself to his feet with the assistance of the iron fence. "It takes something to kill this chicken! I'll be skippin' round lively when Mr. Dirk is playin' checkers with his nose behind wickerwork."

His legs were weak and unsteady and things seemed going round and round. This caused him to cling fast to the fence for a time. Within his head he seemed to hear a mad roaring of machinery, and there was a deadly faintness at the pit of the stomach. This faintness grew so rapidly that he began to fear he was dying. This fear was increased when he put his hand to his head and took it away covered with blood.

Then the boy was seized with a feeling of frenzy at the thought that Black Dirk would triumph after all and Jessie would not be saved from the villain's power. He thought of his poor mother at home, and that seemed to give him strength for one last desperate effort.

"I'll git in—I'll tell Jess!" he panted, as he worked his way along the fence to the steps. "If I had a revolver, I'd shoot Black Dirk!"

He staggered up the steps and looked for the bell-button. It was the first one on the right hand side, and, to his wonder, through a hazy mist that was tinged with crimson, he read:

"JOHN SNOW."

His brain was not clear enough to connect "John Snow" and "Walden White," but he knew the man he was after had rung that bell, so he pushed the button.

Click—the door opened before him. Bracing himself for the effort Bob staggered down the hall to the door he knew must open into the flat he wished to enter. He reached it, but there his strength failed him for the time, and he fell back against the wall in the shadows of a corner.

The door was opened and the head of a colored girl appeared. She glanced toward the front entrance and saw the door standing wide open, but perceived no one there.

"Fo' de lan' sakes, who rung dat bell an' lef' de doah open?" she spluttered. "Wish de folks up-stair stop ringin' dis bell w'en dey wants to git in. Anyhow, dey oughter know e'nuff to shet de doah att'er 'em."

She went down the hall to close the front door.

Bob saw his opportunity, and he improved it, summoning all his strength to walk noiselessly into the flat. By the time the girl returned, he was well out of the way.

The sound of voices in the front room attracted his attention, and he moved toward the parlor, feeling his way now, for his own weakness and the darkness of the rooms rendered it difficult for him to proceed noiselessly.

As he advanced, he realized a man and a woman were quarrelling sharply, and the sound of a familiar voice caused him to brace up to the most of his ability.

"I've found her!" he hoarsely whispered. "She is there—with him!"

He came to some *portieres* and peered through. To his ears came these words:

"You have no right to leave your wife alone so many days, Jack Snow! You did not even tell me where you were going! I have suffered tortures! And now you come back and treat me like this!"

The speaker was a beautiful girl of twenty, with black hair and flashing black eyes. Her slender figure was finely molded and graceful, and her pose, as she confronted the man of the black mustache, was that of a tragedy queen.

The man was Black Dirk, and there was a sneer on his face.

"Very fine!" came cuttingly from his lips. "I scarcely wonder you have aspirations for the stage. You are a natural actress."

"There is no acting about this, Jack Snow! You are driving me to madness! Stand there and sneer in my face! Only a little while ago you were telling me how devotedly you loved me!"

"A little while—why, nearly six weeks. That is a long time. I am beginning to get weary of you, Jessie!"

The shot did not have the effect he expected. Instead, she drew herself up still more proudly, as she cried, like the scream of an eagle:

"And I was always weary of you! I only married you because you promised to advance me on the stage. How have you kept your word? I knew you had money, and it was for that reason I consented to become your wife! Now, that I know you for the brute you are, I detest and loathe you!"

With a furious snarl, the enraged man advanced upon her, his fist clinched and drawn back. She did not quail, but there came a startling interruption.

"Stop!"

The portieres were flung aside and Spotter Bob staggered into the room, his face covered with blood and his eyes glaring as he confronted Black Dirk, who fell back dumfounded.

"Strike her an' I'll kill ye, sure's there's a God!" came from the boy's lips, as one shaking hand was pointed at the astounded villain. "She's my sister!"

The girl uttered a cry and would have clasped him in her arms, but he motioned her away.

"Wait!" he gasped painfully. "I dunno but I'm dyin', an' I want yer to hear what I say before I keel over. If you think—this man's your husband—you're wrong. He's fooled ye—he's got another wife! He's a gambler, a villain, a burglar and a sneak! He—he—I can't tell—I can't— Oh, Jessie!"

He swayed from side to side, his glaring eyes fixed on Black Dirk, then he reeled forward and made an aimless clutch at the man's throat—missed—fell heavily—lay motionless.

The girl flung herself on her knees at his side and quickly lifted his head. Wildly she peered into his white, blood-stained face.

"Robbie!" she cried—"Robbie, brother, speak to me! I'm Jess—your sister Jess!"

He did not stir; he did not breathe!

"Dead!" wailed the girl, and she fainted across his body.

CHAPTER X.

FRANK FINDS HER.

IN vain Silent Dave waited for the reappearance of his boy assistant. Two days passed, and not a sign of Bob did the Man from Idaho behold. He was filled with astonishment and wonder, for he did not believe it possible the boy would desert him thus. If Bob had deserted him, then something must have happened to the young fakir. The time when he had promised to show up and point out Black Dirk to the man without a tongue had expired and another slipped away with it.

What chance prevented Silent Dave and Black Dirk from meeting it is impossible to say, for the man from the West was constantly on the outlook, and it hardly seemed Dirk tried to avoid his deadly enemy. It was fate that kept them apart.

Something convinced the Westerner that the boy shadow had been dealt foully with, but how could he learn the truth? That was the question that troubled him.

While he was puzzling over this, Frank Anson appeared and asked for Bob. Anson was not a little surprised and alarmed when the Silent Man had written out that his boy assistant was missing and had been missing for two days.

"Something has happened to him!" cried the blacksmith, his rugged face taking on a look of alarm.

Silent Dave nodded an agreement.

"I wondered he had not been to see me," continued Frank, who had been told by the hotel clerk of the Westerner's peculiarity in never speaking, although he could hear as well as any one. "We are the very best of friends and always have been since I took his part one time when he was set upon by a gang of young ruffians. He was fighting like a little tiger, but they were too many for him, and he was being punished unmercifully. If I had not appeared they would have beaten him senseless. As it was, he was so used up I had to get him home. In that way I met his parents and his sister."

Frank hesitated and flushed a bit on mentioning Jessie. The eyes of the tongueless man were fixed upon him, and a light of comprehension flashed across Silent Dave's face. The gleam was gone in a moment, but the speechless man understood the situation as well as if it had been fully explained.

Dave nodded again, but this time it was an invitation for the blacksmith to proceed.

"I took a liking to the plucky youngster," Frank went on; "and I used to visit his home. His folks were poor, but Bob had snap and go in him, and he earned lots of money faking. He went at it when he was quite small, and his brisk way of making things hum led the kids to call him Old Business."

"Of course my interest in the family grew," added Frank, his eyes failing to meet Silent Dave's steady look. "Bob's father is dead. His sister came to New York to go upon the stage, for which she had an aptitude. Bob followed her, and, as he is a negligent rascal about writing, although he sends his mother money regularly, Mrs. Braddock was worried and wished me to come on and find him."

"That is about all there is to tell. I found him searching for his sister, whom he had not found. I was to assist him, but he has not shown up at my place."

Silent Dave paced the room, his head bent and his eyes on the floor. For nearly five minutes he did not glance at his visitor, and then, all at once, he paused in front of Frank, to swiftly say:

"His foe is my foe. I gave him three days of grace, although he was bound to me by agreement. That time is up, with one day added. It looks bad."

"It does," agreed Frank.

"Will you go to the police?"

"If you think best."

Dave nodded.

"Tell them about the boy and his missing sister. Give them your address, and ask them to communicate if anything turns up. Give descriptions, names, ages, etc. It is the best thing now."

There was little more that could be done, save keep a lookout themselves, and that did not promise much. Frank left Silent Dave, neither feeling greatly encouraged.

The police were duly notified, but no great interest was shown over the affair. The disappearance of an ordinary boy seemed too commonplace to arouse them to activity.

Street lamps were gleaming when Frank passed two men at the corner of Fifth avenue and Twenty-third street. For some reason, he noticed their words distinctly.

"I tell you I must have the money," a large man who wore a coal-black mustache was saying. "I have met with terrific reverses in the last two days, and there are bets I must meet or be ruined. I hold your I. O. U.'s."

"For God's sake, White, don't press me now!" entreated the other and younger man, who was a handsome fellow. "I can't raise the money unless—unless—"

"You can raise it some way—you must! I accommodated you when you needed it."

"I wish to God you hadn't!"

"It's not my fault you lost."

"How can I pay now?"

"There must be a way for a—"

Frank lost the rest of the sentence, but he turned and looked at the two men after he had passed them quite a little distance, fixing their faces in his mind.

Little did he think one of them could have told him all about the missing Bob Braddock.

That one was Mr. Walden White, alias John Snow, alias Black Dirk.

The man to whom the scheming villain was talking was the young bank cashier Willis Steele. The time had come for Dirk to "put on the screws," and he was starting at it in earnest. Steele began to understand the terrible box he was in.

Frank strolled on, but the face of Black Dirk remained before him, although he knew not why. He kept thinking of the man and of the words he had accidentally overheard. He realized the young man of the handsome face and blonde mustache was in a serious fix and that other man, whom he had instinctively set down as a rogue, was crowding the unfortunate fellow to the wall.

All at once, he turned around and walked back. He knew not why he did so, but some influence, subtle but powerful, seemed guiding him. He realized he was going back to take another look at the face of a man who was an utter stranger to him and a rascal at that, but still he feared Dirk would be gone when he reached Twenty-third street.

As he was hastening eagerly along, he saw a person approaching with nervous steps, his face white and set, a desperate gleam in his eyes.

Frank recognized the young man to whom Dirk had been talking—the man who had protested his inability to pay his I. O. U.'s.

Willis Steele swept by, heading up Broadway, a feeling in his heart which, until that day, he had ever been a stranger to—a feeling of bitter rebellion against fate and a hatred for himself and his fellow-men.

"Poor devil!" thought the blacksmith, although Steele was dressed in the height of fashion and Anson wore very plain clothes.

"He's in hard luck and ready to do something he ought not to. It's all on account of that man of the black mustache."

He feared Dirk would be gone from the corner, but the plotter was there, having lighted a fresh cigar, at which he was comfortably puffing, just the trace of a triumphant, satisfied smile on his face. He did not look like a man who was in desperate need of money; rather, he looked like one who had just made a strike that let him in on Easy street.

Wondering why he did so, Frank halted where he could watch Black Dirk deliberately drawing on his gloves. The adventurer fitted the gloves to his soft, white hands with all the delicacy of a dainty maiden, his crook-handle cane hanging on his left arm as he walked. He eyed with smiling, significant leer every pretty girl who passed, his evil meaning being written so plainly on his face that a glance from his eyes was an insult.

Frank Anson grew to hate the man in a few seconds. He read the story of Dirk's life on his face, and he wondered if the truth were not as plain to every one who saw him. He was astounded to think a bright-appearing, open-faced young fellow like Willis Steele could be ensnared by so palpable a scoundrel.

Although he was not aware of the fact, Frank was a natural character-reader.

Having finished drawing on his gloves, Black Dirk flicked a bit of flaky ash from his cigar and then turned to saunter toward

Sixth avenue. He was unaware that his back was being studied by a pair of keen eyes. Frank noted the poise of the man's head, the set of his Alpine hat, the shiny silk having been discarded for the time. He studied Dirk's shoulders till he would have known them anywhere, and to him they were the shoulders of a villain, crafty and polished. He observed the complaisant carriage of the body and the haughty, self-assertive step. He felt he would know Black Dirk again, even were the man in disguise.

And then something led him to follow Dirk. He did not think he was wasting time, for, somehow, he did not think anything about it then.

Dirk turned up Sixth avenue. Frank wondered why the man should choose to walk there when Broadway was the favorite resort of polished criminals, ex-dive-keepers and men of shady reputation.

The man of many names had not gone far before he suddenly came face to face with a beautiful girl who was hurrying swiftly along, regarding every one searchingly. She stopped him and caught him convulsively by the arm.

Frank saw it all—saw the girl speak swiftly and earnestly, her excitement increasing with every word. He had halted, his hand lifted to his heart with an involuntary motion.

Could it be?

"No! no!"

He whispered the word, and even then he felt he was wrong. The form, the face, every gesture were familiar. True, the girl was attired in the most stylish garments; true diamonds blazed upon her person—yet he knew her.

"It's Jessie!"

He started forward, forgetting everything but the fact that he had found her. Swiftly he hurried to her side, regardless of the man to whom she was speaking.

"Jessie!"

She heard him and turned quickly. When she saw him, her face paled and a little cry was wrung from her lips, as she fell back a step.

"Frank Anson!"

He halted instantly, coming to his senses with a shock that pervaded his entire body. He lifted his hat with the true politeness of a natural-born gentleman, although every nerve of his being was quivering. Before him stood the girl he loved and to whom he had at one time been engaged. He had even dreamed in those days that she loved him.

"I thought it was you," he said, slowly, trying to steady his voice, while Black Dirk, calmly puffing his strong cigar, looked from one to the other in a wondering, sneering manner, seeming to comprehend the truth, which was not difficult, as they had quite betrayed themselves.

Then her pale face flushed crimson, as she glanced from Frank to the scornful face of the other man. She hesitated, and then, suddenly holding out her gloved hand, she somewhat fiercely cried:

"I'm awfully glad to see you, Mr. Anson! It is such a surprise! I did not know you were in the city!" And then she turned to Black Dirk defiantly, saying: "This is a dear friend of mine, and one of the best fellows in the whole world."

Black Dirk yawned, lifting a gloved hand to his mouth, the cigar held daintily in his fingers.

"You don't say so!"

There was an insult in the words.

"Yes," affirmed Jessie, undauntedly. "This is Mr. Frank Anson, of Philadelphia. Mr. Anson, this is my husband, Mr. John Snow."

CHAPTER XI.

IN A BOWERY BEER GARDEN.

FRANK stood rigid and motionless a second, and then he bowed blindly, a mist before his

eyes, through which he dimly saw the hateful face of the man he had already spotted as a villain beyond a doubt.

Her husband! She was married—to that man!

It was at least an hour later when he came quite to himself. Then he tried to remember what he had said and done, but it was all a vague jumble in his mind. He knew he had said something, but he did not even remember when he had left them or what excuses he had made, if any. The only thing he could remember distinctly was his wild, insane desire to fling himself at the throat of the miserable wretch who had robbed him of her. It was only by the strongest effort of his will that he refrained.

He had found her, but he had parted from her without even asking where she lived or telling her of her father's death. Above all things, he had not expected to find her married, and the blow had quite knocked him out.

For a young man who had been reared in a city like Philadelphia, Frank was rather unsophisticated.

He wandered on and on, never heeding whither he was going. Even after he came quite to himself, he kept walking, for he felt that he must do something to wear off the feeling of fierce resentment against fate that was gnawing at his heart.

Even though Jessie had cast him over and left her home, he had not quite given up hope. After her father's death, he had dreamed that she might return some day and be content to marry him.

Now he realized how foolish had been his dreams. He had lost her—lost her forever.

But that she should have married a scoundrel—a man with the word "villain" written so distinctly on his face that it seemed a miracle she had not seen it.

He pitied her, for he knew what her life must be—he knew the day would come when she would regret her foolish venture.

Like a maniac he strode along the streets for a while, but, as he grew calmer, his step lost its fierce vigor. His head was bowed and he sometimes staggered. Through dark ways he went, where slinking figures slouched past him and evil eyes peered unseen at his face. He crossed brilliantly lighted and crowded streets, where the car-gongs clanged angrily at him and cabbies bawled for him to get out of the way. More than once he was brushed by wheels, more than once he was nearly run down by cars, but he paid little heed to these things.

Finally, he startled himself by uttering a harsh, scornful laugh. He looked around and found himself on a street where the steam cars were thundering along overhead. The street was well lighted, but the class of people around him were far from prepossessing. He soon realized he was on the Bowery, where he had been once or twice before.

Glancing at his open-faced silver watch, he was astounded to discover it was well along toward midnight.

"Great Scott!" he muttered. "What have I been doing all these hours?"

It was early in the evening when he first saw Willis Steele and Black Dirk talking at the corner of Fifth avenue and Twenty-third street. It seemed only a few minutes before that Jessie was introducing him to the man of the black mustache as her husband; and still it seemed a very long time—weeks or months.

"Well, I've been a fool!" he said, sharply, straightening up. "I ought to have known better! It's all over now, and I'm glad of it!"

He started to walk up the street, and the sound of singing and music attracted his attention. Through some wide doors, he caught a glimpse of a large, poorly-lighted room, where people were sitting around tables, drinking from big glasses. At the

further end of the room was a well lighted stage, on which some kind of a performance was being carried on. Over the door was a sign that said: "Summer Beer Garden. Continuous Performance. Admission Free."

Frank Anson was not a drinking man, but he suddenly decided to go into the place and drink something. He knew he could not sleep, and it was possible the show, wretched though it happened to be, might help him pass away a short time.

He went in and sat down at a table in one of the darkest corners. Still he was espied by one of the vigilant waiters, who promptly trotted over and asked what he would have. Frank ordered beer, which was quickly placed before him. To his own surprise, he tipped the waiter a dime, receiving in return a short nod and "t'anks."

The show did not interest him, and without touching the beer, he bent forward resting his face on his arms, which lay on the table. He was thinking it all over, but he did not stir, and his position seemed to indicate he was asleep. There were not many patrons in the place at that hour, and the corner where Frank sat was quite deserted save by him.

All at once, Frank realized two newcomers had seated themselves at a table not far away. He did not start to look up, although the voice of one was familiar, as he asked the waiter:

"Who's this fellow lounging on the table? What's the matter with him?"

To Frank's surprise, the waiter replied:

"Dat's a frien' of mine—dead straight. He's been hittin' de pipe an' warpin' his arm too much of late. Git ter seein' bugs an' t'ings. Don' mind him. He's jes' takin' a quiet snooze."

It was the waiter he had feed, and he suddenly realized what ten cents had done. He knew the waiter did not believe him sleeping, and he was equally well aware the fellow was working for a second tip.

But what aroused Frank's greatest interest was the fact that the man who made the inquiry was without doubt Mr. John Snow, Jessie's husband.

The young blacksmith did not move; instead, he breathed heavily, as if he were in truth asleep.

"Dat cove's all right," said a third voice. "We can talk low, an' he won't hear, if he does wake up."

They ordered drinks, which were brought by the waiter, and then they fell to talking in whispers. Somehow, Frank felt that he ought to hear what they were saying, for he could but believe they were plotting evil, in which case he felt it was no wrong to play the eavesdropper.

In the course of a few moments, he managed to steal a look at the men, and he discovered he had made no mistake in thinking one of them was John Snow. The scoundrel's companion was a man with a rascally mug, a low order of crook, but he evidently aped his master in dress and manner, though not in speech.

It was Budge Farrel.

After a while, seeing Frank still seemed to be sleeping soundly, the two men gradually grew less cautious in their talk, although it still would have been impossible for any one further away than the blacksmith to have heard what they were saying.

At first Frank could not make out the drift of their conversation, although he plainly understood a word or two now and then; but, at length, Black Dirk said distinctly:

"I've got him now, and I'll pinch him."

"Dat's right," chuckled Farrel, villainously. "Pinch him hard."

"He can't raise the money to save him," Dirk went on, "and he won't face the disgrace of exposure. If I crowd him to the wall, he'll dip from the bank's funds."

"An' den—w'at?"

"I'll threaten to expose him and turn him

over if he don't go in with us to clean out the bank and skip to Canada. He'll do it."

"Sure?"

"Yes, sure. I've got Mr. Willis Steele pinched."

"Don't use dat word pinched, pal!"

"Why not?"

"Don't like it. It means pulled, nipped, arrested—an' it gives me de shivers."

Black Dirk laughed shortly.

"All right, just as you say. All we care about is to look out we're not pinched."

"You bet! How 'bout de fairy?"

"On Twenty-fourth street?"

"Yes."

"She's been cutting up rusty since that little affair of the other night—won't give me any peace."

"You'll shake her?"

"Of course. Jessie's a hot-headed little witch, and I'll be glad to get rid of her."

"How 'bout yer real wife up in Harlem?"

"She'll follow me wherever I go."

This reply was scarcely heard by the man who seemed to be sleeping at a near-by table. Budge Farrel's question had quite taken away his breath, and it was with the greatest difficulty he refrained from uttering a cry. As it was a gasping groan came from his lips.

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE SCENT.

"HELLO!"

Black Dirk turned and looked suspiciously at Frank.

"Wot's der matter wid dat bloke?" came from Budge Farrel. "I t'ink he's dreamin' an' der dreams don't agree wid him."

"That's all," agreed Dirk, with relief. "The queer sound he made gave me a start."

Then the two rascals put their heads close together and spoke in such low tones that, for a time, the blacksmith could hear no more than a mumbling sound.

It was with the greatest difficulty Frank could keep from leaping to his feet, and throttling Black Dirk. He now understood how the wretch had deceived Jessie Braddock and led her into a marriage that was really no marriage at all.

But, at the same time, Mr. John Snow, or whatever his name was, had committed bigamy!

He should be fitly punished; Frank vowed that within his heart.

He was not given much time for thought, for the plotters began to speak loud enough for him to hear once more. And what they said gave Frank such a shock that he was tremble all over in a moment.

"Wot yer want me ter do wid der kid?" inquired Farrel.

"Just keep him quiet till he can't spoil my game—nothing more," replied the chief rascal.

The kid! Was it possible they meant Bob? The thought caused the listener to hold his breath and listen for the next words.

"He was plumb leery fer a while."

"How is he now?"

"O. K., but weak."

"You gave him a terrible thump."

"Near cracked his nut, I reckon. Struck him harder dan I meant ter. I was 'feared he'd croak."

"And I thought he had croaked when I saw him tumble down in the middle of the floor before me. If he had talked one minute longer, he'd raised merry blazes with the girl. As it was, he swore I had another wife."

"How'd yer git out of dat?"

"Put up a big bluff—said the boy was crazy from the blow. It went kind of hard, but I made it go."

"I reckon she raised der old snap w'en she came outer de fainty spell an' found him gone?"

"That she did, but I calmed her by saying I had sent him to a hospital."

"Didn't she want ter go?"

"Yes, and I promised to take her in the morning."

"Den yer didn't?"

"Not any. I never showed up till the next night, and then I declared the surgeon had fixed the kid up, called him all right and let him go without my knowledge. I swore I had tried to find out what had become of the boy, but had utterly failed. That was what had kept me away all day."

Budge Farrel chuckled with admiration.

"Great head! You'd oughter been in polerticks. Youse a jolly liar!"

More drinks were ordered, and then Farrel asked:

"Wot if de kid should happen ter croak on me han's?"

Black Dirk looked searchingly at his sycophant.

"I hope you don't have an idea of putting him out of the way?"

"He's a big bother."

"Better bother than to do that. I never killed but one man in my life, and that was in self-defense. I don't want to have anything to do with snuffing out a boy."

"Well, jest as you say. But sometimes dese boys make heaps of trouble. W'en he gets loose, he's jest de kind of a chicken ter buy a gun an' go lookin' fer de man wot played his sister crooked."

"I'll be far enough away by that time."

"Well, it's nottink ter me, so youse pays me fer lookin' arter de young rat."

"I want you to look after him well; don't let him slip you; not under any circumstances."

"Not on yer life."

Then their conversation turned to other matters.

Frank Anson's blood was boiling. There was no doubt in his mind but he had discovered what had happened to Bob Braddock, and he resolved to render the unlucky lad assistance, if such a thing were in the power of human being. A dozen plans chased each other through his head, the chief of them all being to follow the men upon the street and have them arrested as soon as possible.

But this plan was soon discarded, for he realized the rascals would swear there was no truth in his charge, and, as he knew not where Bob was confined, he could not prove there was.

He must first find the unlucky boy.

That was settled, but how was it to be done? He was doubtful of his ability to play the shadow, and yet it seemed he must undertake it.

And he did.

Barely had Black Dirk and Budge Farrel left the garden before he was on his feet. The waiter he had tipped was at his side, and he thrust a quarter into his hand, but did not even say a word. The place was on the point of closing, the stage show being over for the night, but that was nothing to Frank. Out upon the street he flung, already fearing he would lose sight of his man.

Budge was just parting from Black Dirk, a short distance away. Frank halted in the shadow of a doorway and watched the men until they separated, then he started after Farrel promptly.

The amateur trailer worked with the greatest caution, all the while in terror lest Farrel should suspect he was tracked and give him the slip.

"With God's help, I'll get Bob out of his scrape this night!" he whispered to himself.

"Then we'll see if we can't spoil the vile game of these two villainous crooks. Bob has a level head, and we can make things hot if we work together."

Farrel strode along at a rapid pace, and certain it is he did not dream he was followed, for he made not the least effort to baffle a

pursuer. He struck into a maze of dirty crooked streets, some of which were poorly lighted and villainous in the extreme.

It was in this wretched quarter that the man Frank was following suddenly turned and descended the cellar steps of a dismal, tottering building. He was gone so quickly that the young blacksmith was startled.

"Ten to one that's the hole!" exultingly thought the tracker. "It's just the kind of a place I'd expect would be used to confine Bob in. Now, the matter of getting the boy out follows, and that is the difficult part of the job."

CHAPTER XIII.

BOB TURNS THE TABLES.

LITTLE did Budge Farrel know what greeting awaited him when he so boldly made his way into the basement of the ramshackle house on that dark and wretched street.

The doors opened to his touch and he pushed his way along as one thoroughly familiar with every crook and turn of the place.

The thug was feeling pretty well, as he had imbibed quite freely since sunset, having won on the races the day before, besides being paid a comfortable sum by Black Dirk for the dirty work he had performed.

"Dis is jest like findin' plunks!" he chuckled, all alone to himself in the darkness of the place. A rat ran squeaking from beneath his feet and scampered into its hole. It did not startle him for his nerves were not at all fine.

"If Jack could only git dis cashier fool on de hip an' find out der combination of der bank safe, we'd make a haul dat'd set us up in business fer a long time. Der boss is a cool one, an' he's got a great head—great head!"

And Budge himself would have a "great head" by the coming of another day.

He took some keys from his pocket and jingled them in the dark.

"Wonder how der kid is standin' de racket," he mused. "Dat boy's got grit sure; he won't whine, he won't. Some chickens'd be skeered ter deat' of de rats, tied up like he is. He can't do nort'in' but roll over."

He found a lock and fitted the key to it. The key turned readily and a door swung open, allowing him to step into a room that was also dark.

"Hello, kid!" he called. "Where be ye?"

"Right here!"

The words sounded in his ear, and then he received a blow on the head that dropped him like a log on the floor!

A second later, a match was struck, and the flame revealed the eager face of a boy that bent over the thug's prostrate form to peer inquiringly into his face.

In his hand the boy held a brick, with which the terrible blow had been delivered.

And that boy was Bob Braddock.

"That's the business!" came cheerfully from the lad's lips. "Knocked out in the first round and with a single swipe! Talk about Sullivan an' Corbett an' them fellers—give me a brick!"

The match went out, but he promptly lighted another and began a search through the room for a lamp. He soon found one, dirty, greasy and with a broken chimney. This was lighted and served his purpose very well.

"Right in town!" he laughed, grimly. "Now to fix Mr. Budge so he won't budge till I git reddy for him."

Bob was pale and dirty, while there were still signs of crusted blood on the side of his face, indicating he had not washed since the knock out blow given him by the man he had just served in a similar manner. His nerve was unbroken, however, and he was deliberate and cool in all his movements, as if they had been carefully planned before-

hand. From his manner one would scarcely have imagined he had been held a captive in that lonely place for so many long hours, utterly uncertain as to what his fate would be.

He went back to the place where Budge Farrel lay. The man was breathing slightly and beginning to groan. This told Bob he would soon have his senses and be ready to show fight, so the boy promptly set the lamp down on the floor, turned the big ruffian on his face and bound his hands behind him. The cords used to bind Farrel were the very ones with which Bob had been secured.

"I'll do a good job, old man," half-laughed the lad as he swiftly and skillfully tied the knots. "I'll agree that you won't work your hands out of these, even though you try as long and as hard as I did. I know a few sailor twists, and they're the things to hang. Here goes one—and here another."

By the time Farrel had opened his eyes, the boy had bound him, hands and feet, and was sitting carelessly on a low box, cheerfully whistling a jolly tune.

"Hello, Budgie," nodded the lad, cutting his whistle short. "How do you find yourself?"

The ruffian glared, started to rise, and then fell back, for the first time realizing something was wrong.

"Wot's der matter? Hands ketched—"

"Like a clock. You fell down an' got twisted. Never mind. I'll tell you the same as you did me: Your mouth's free. Squeal all you want to; won't nobody hear ye."

"Curses on ye—"

"Oh, come now! None of that! It isn't pious—it isn't pretty. Be calm, Budgie. I want to have a little social chat with ye."

"I'll cut dat t'roat of yours!"

"Not this evening, Budge. It's my turn now. You had lots of fun with me for a while, but turn about usually gets there with both feet, an' the feet are in it around now. You used to sit on this box an' jolly me in great shape; now see how you like it."

"How'd ye git loose?"

"Took a twist an' turned myself wrong side out. That left me on the outside of the ropes, an' they just dropped off. Then I turned myself back, an' there I was. It's no trick at all after you know how."

The snared thug raved and fumed until he nearly choked and his face was purple. All the while Spotter Bob sat on the box whistling, seeming to enjoy the affair thoroughly. When Farrel had grown calmer, Bob observed:

"S'pose ye had to do it—must let off steam. I know just how ye feel—felt so myself a while ago."

"Oh, you'll suffer fer dis!" snarled Budge.

"That's so—I don't think. Anyhow, it won't worry me a little bit."

"Wot be ye goin' ter do?"

"Oh, I propose to keep you here till I beautifully wind up the worsted of that high-toned friend of yours who hired you to bring me here in a cab an' keep me fast while he was cuttin' up his deviltry. I'm goin' to crush him, sure's I'm Spotter Bob, the Rogue-Crusher. I'm onto his whole little game bigger'n a bear, an' the way I'll spoil it will make him very, very fatigued."

Again Budge raved, but he grew calm more quickly. Then, knowing he could not scare Bob into doing anything of the kind, he tried to hire the boy to set him at liberty, making all manner of fair-seeming promises.

"All I wants is ter git meself outer dis snap," asserted the thug; "an' I'm willin' ter pay great fer dat. Jest give me a chance ter skip dis town, an' I'll let Jack Snow hustle fer himself."

Bob laughed.

"Budgie, thou art a prevaricator! Get

thee hence into the yonder! Beg pawdon—I forgot you couldn't git any to speak of. To put it dead easy, I know you're lyin', an' you know you're lyin'. I've got you safe an' quiet, and right here you rest your weary bones until I do the crushing act. After that—well, I don't know what the police have against ye. You must think that over for yourself. I shall tell them where you are, after I have played my cards."

"Now, let me advise ye, as you advised me, to take things cool. The rats may come out and tickle your chin with their whiskers and set on yer throbbin' buzzum an' file their teeth, but they'll serve as company. Don't mind them—they ain't very hungry. If you sleep, I trust your dreams will be sweet. I'm goin' now. I'll leave the lamp up here on this shelf. It'll help out as long as it burns, and that's more'n you ever done fer me."

Five minutes later, Spotter Bob issued from the basement door and ascended to the street. He knew not which part of the city he was in, and, as he was looking about in an attempt to get his bearings, a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder, and a voice cried in his ear:

"Bob Braddock, by Heaven!"

CHAPTER XIV.

BOB THROWS UP HIS JOB.

SPOTTER BOB wheeled like a cat, ready to fight or run away, whichever proved the most expedient.

It was not necessary to do either.

"Don't you know me, Bob?" asked the man who had greeted his appearance thus unexpectedly.

"Frank Anson!"

"Right, my boy."

"But—but, how'd you git here?"

"Walked."

"Yes; but what brought ye?"

"My feet."

Bob made a vigorous protest, and then Frank briefly told him how he came to be there. In turn, Bob related his own experiences and how he had turned the tables on Budge Farrel, the two being on the move all the while they were talking.

"You're a dandy!" cried Frank, admiringly, his own trouble being forgotten for the time. "You've got stuff in you! Some boys would be dead after all this."

"Thanks awfully! My blushes are veiled by the shadders. But, I'm right glad you turned up, Frank. We'd best stick together now and work this business out."

"Good! I'm ready. I did not tell you all I heard in that beer garden."

"No?"

"This villain of the black mustache passes himself for your sister's husband. I saw her last night, and she introduced me to him as her husband, but he has—"

"Another wife."

"How'd you know?"

"I've been runnin' that fox for some time. Got him laid out from A to t'other end of the alphabet."

"Do you know where to find this other wife?"

"You bet!"

"Can you put your hand on her at short notice?"

"Just as quick as I can ride to Harlem."

"Good! If we work right, we can snap this whelp for bigamy and clear Jessie off him."

"I've got a bigger scheme than that, if it'll go, an' what you told me him an' Budge Farrel said about gettin' the bank cashier foul makes me think it will."

"What is it?"

"Give him a show to rob the bank an' have him pulled for that. The only hitch 'll be in gettin' the cashier to work with us."

"But how about Farrel?"

"He's all right. I tied him up so he won't get away till somebody cuts the ropes."

"Snow, or whatever his name is, may come down and find him. That would spill the whole plate of soup."

"It won't happen."

"Why not?"

"Budge tole me one time when he was settin' round on the box and talkin' that Black Dirk didn't know where he'd took me ner care a rap so long as I was kept out of the way for a few days. He said he could shut off my wind if he took a fancy, and Dirk'd never ask no questions. He tried to scare me, but it didn't go for a cent."

"I'm afraid your other scheme won't go. If we try too much, we may lose the whole game."

They thoroughly discussed the matter as they walked briskly along. In a short time, they had passed from the maze of dark and crooked streets and were hurrying up-town.

All at once, Bob halted.

"Great ginger!" he cried.

"What is it?"

"Silent Dave."

"What of him?"

"I'm boun' to let him know 'bout Black Dirk."

"He hired you?"

"Sure."

"Are you under pay now?"

"No. He gave me three days to find Jessie. At the end of that time, I was to come round an' put him on Black Dirk. The time is up."

"When?"

"Well, I dunno jest, fer it seems like I had been trussed up like a veal fer a month."

"You couldn't get around when the time expired?"

"Not much."

"Then Silent Dave, as you call him, can't blame you. I have seen him. He was worried about you. But, as you were not on hand at the time set and could not get there, I don't see as it will make much difference if he waits a little longer. Remember it is for your sister's good you are working now—you want to free her of this rascal."

"An' I think I'd free her the quickest by pointin' out Black Dirk to Silent Dave."

"How? What does Dave want of the man?"

"I kinder reckon he wants ter shoot him," was Bob's cool answer.

Anson was astonished and alarmed.

"That would be murder!"

"I dunno 'bout that," came a trifle grimly from the boy's lips. "If ever any whelp deserved to be shot it's this same Black Dirk!"

A sudden look of fury crossed the young blacksmith's face, and he cried:

"You're right! If anything, it's too easy punishment for him!"

"What if I put Dave after him?"

Frank did not immediately reply. He thought it over as calmly as he could under the circumstances, and his judgment warned him that it was best not to be rash.

"It would be aiding a human being to stain his hands with blood," he said gravely, as if speaking to himself more than anything else. "No! It would simply involve us all in trouble. But, by heaven!" he suddenly grated; "I'd shoot him myself, if there were no other way of setting Jessie free!"

Frank possessed a great deal of solid sense, and finally pronounced it as his opinion that it would be wrong to aid Silent Dave in any murderous designs. He did not doubt Dave had been injured so greatly that he was almost—if not quite—justified in taking the law into his own hands; still, should he deliberately kill the villain, the world would regard it as murder.

However, it took Frank a long time to convince Bob he ought not to do as he had promised the Man from 'Wayback. He was forced to reason that, if a man hired out with another without fully understanding the nature of the duties he was to perform, and afterward discovered he was expected to do an unlawful or morally wrong action, it was proper that he should promptly refuse to have anything further to do with the matter.

"It'll be like pullin' teeth," declared Bob; "but I'm goin' straight to Dave an' tell him I'm out of it. He can have back the money he's paid me."

Heavy trucks and milk-carts were stirring by the time they reached the vicinity of Twenty-eighth street. There was a gray light in the eastern sky that told of approaching day, although Frank Anson could scarcely realize the night was gone.

An eventful night it had been.

Both the man and the boy were hungry; so they went to a restaurant on Sixth avenue that keeps open all night, where they procured a hearty feed, having first been permitted the use of a wash-room.

They felt much better when they stepped forth into the open air once more, washed and refreshed.

Bob decided to go to the Tower House at once and see if he could not get to Silent Dave. Frank was to wait for him outside.

A black boy was washing off the steps and the walk by the hotel. The door was open, and Bob walked straight in. Up the stairs he went and to the room of the Silent Man.

At the first sound of his knock, the door was opened, as if he had been expected. Silent Dave stood there, as the light of the gas-jet burning behind plainly showed. His curtains were close drawn; his face was pale.

Scarcely a muscle altered when the man saw the boy at the door, but his eyes attested his delight. He held out his hand and gave Bob such a grip that the boy winced.

Into the room Bob was drawn, and the man of no words motioned for him to sit down. But the young shadower shook his head.

"I suppose you want me to tell you where I have been all this time?" said Bob, reading the question in the eyes of the other.

Silent Dave bowed.

Then the lad related everything that had happened to him, making the narration brief but clear.

As the mute man listened, only the wonderful eyes in the man's head expressed the emotions he felt. His face was as grave as that of a marble man.

On a little table were pens, ink and paper. Evidently Silent Dave had been writing for hours; possibly he had not slept for the night.

When Bob had told everything, the Man from Idaho picked up his pad and pencil.

"You have come back to keep your promise?" he wrote.

"You want me to take you to Black Dirk?" questioned Bob.

Dave bowed, his eyes glowing.

"What do you want of him?"

The Westerner hesitated, finally writing: "That should be of no interest to you now that you have found your sister. I want him!"

"You mean to kill him?"

Silent Dave turned away and walked the length of the room and back. When he stopped before the boy again, there was a dancing fiend in his eyes. He wrote on the pad:

"His life belongs to me! I would take it!"

"Then I'll have to throw up my job," declared Bob. "I can't take no hand in a game of murder."

CHAPTER XV.

SILENT DAVE'S STORY.

SILENT DAVE did not seem so very much surprised, although a look of regret passed across his face.

"I'll give ye back all the money you has paid me," the boy added, diving into his own pocket and pulling out a purse. "I don't take plunks fer doin' nothin'."

But the Man from 'Wayback would not have it, as his vigorous gestures implied.

"No," he wrote; "I do not want it back."

With two steps, he reached the table and caught up the paper on which he had been writing, and then he placed it in Bob's hands.

"Do you want me ter read it?" questioned the lad.

"Read!" flashed the pencil on the pad. "Then, perhaps, you will aid me in finding my game. It is true—every word!"

While Silent Dave walked the room, Spotter Bob Braddock read what he had written. It was the story of his life from the time he first met Black Dirk until the desperado did him an injury the laws of earth could not atone for. It is not necessary to give it in full. Briefly, Black Dirk had lured the younger sister of the Silent Man away, under pretense of marriage, and Dave had followed the wretch to the wilds of the West, it being his intention to hound Dirk from place to place and ruin him in some way at last. He had thought this much more satisfactory than taking the villain's life.

For a time, Dave was successful. He drove Dirk—whose true name was Belton Elvaun—from one place to another, publicly disgracing him several times. At length, Dirk fled to a wild mountain camp in Idaho. He had in reality married a beautiful woman and had a child—a girl; but when Dave thought of his betrayed sister, who had, in her despair, taken her life, there was no pity in the brother's heart. He tracked Dirk down again and appeared in the camp, but in disguise. Then he set about disgracing the villain in the sight of the wild men with whom he had already become hand and glove.

Dave saw how his opportunity might come about, for Black Dirk was supporting himself by gambling, his tricks being very slick and hard to detect. The tireless trailer knew the game of poker from start to finish, with all its fine points and delicate shadings, and one night he sat down in the principal saloon of the camp, with his deadly foe facing him across the table! Black Dirk had not penetrated Dave's newest disguise.

They played, and for a time the game ran very evenly, for both were skillful. No one had been able to hold his own with Black Dirk in that town, and the betting being heavy, a throng of spectators gathered about the table. The trailer watched his time.

It came. He saw Dirk "hold out" a card to make him four of a kind. In an instant the tracker had reached across the board, grasped the gambler's wrist, jerked it above his head and exposed the trick to the spectators. Dirk tried to draw a weapon and shoot, but the black muzzle of Dave's revolver yawned before his eyes.

Then the tracker threw off his disguise and told the spectators the story of the rascal's deeds. He painted Dirk in the blackest colors, and when he had finished, the card-sharp sat pale as a sheet before him. With a fierce oath, Dirk swore to live until he had cut Dave's tongue out of his mouth! That night the whooping citizens of the camp rode the gambler out of town on a rail, his naked body being decorated with a coat of tar and feathers!

Three months later, while trying to get track of Dirk once more, Dave was captured by a gang of outlaws. And his deadly foe was chief of the band!

Then Black Dirk kept his oath. Bound hands and feet, the avenger of a sister's wrongs was taunted and reviled by the triumphant dastard. Dirk flashed a keen knife before Dave's eyes, laughing fiendishly as he declared that was the blade with which he would cut out the brother's tongue. He tried to make Dave cringe and beg, but failed. Then one of his strong satellites, at his command, flung himself on the bound man and fastened a pair of sinewy hands on Dave's throat. The wretched prisoner was strangled until his tongue was forced from his mouth, so that Dirk could have his terrible revenge!

It was months after that when Dave recovered to find himself in a hospital at Denver. He remembered nothing that had taken place from the moment he was choked into unconsciousness until he came to his right mind, in the hospital. And then he discovered he was speechless—his tongue was gone! He could make sounds which sounded like some words, but the noises were so horrible they always frightened strangers, and so he ceased attempting to speak at all.

When he was strong enough to be discharged from the hospital, he set out once more upon the trail of Black Dirk, to kill the man without mercy. Twice, in New Orleans and in Chicago, he had nearly accomplished the purpose of his life, but the watchful Dirk slipped him both times. The arch villain fled, now plainly in terror of his terrible foe. And finally, Dave had tracked him to New York.

It was a fascinating yarn, vividly written, horrible and blood-chilling in places. At the close, the Man Without a Tongue stated that something told him he would soon square accounts with his enemy. He had written the story to carry in his pocket, so that he might not be classed as a common brutal murderer. His last statement was that he would not be taken alive by the police and brought to a bar of justice to answer for his act, if he did kill Dirk.

When Bob had read it all, he stole a look at the man, who was pacing the floor in great agitation. A terrible thought had come to him, and now it grew stronger and stronger.

He believed Silent Dave's mind was unbalanced!

Without looking at Bob, the avenger seemed to understand that the boy had finished. He made a gesture which plainly asked what was thought of the story.

"I don't wonder you want his scalp," said Bob; and he spoke the truth.

The pencil flashed across the pad, asking: "Will you aid me now?"

"Can't. I don't blame you none, but killin's killin', an' I don't care about takin' a hand in nary murder trial."

"Then I will go it alone. The time is at hand!"

Bob did not stay much longer; he was anxious to get away. At parting, the Silent Man wrung him warmly by the hand, looking into his face in a manner that betokened regard. Bob promising to come again, hurried down the stairs.

The young spotter had a story to tell Frank Anson—a story that was so interesting it seemed like a chapter out of a novel.

"Now," said Bob, as he noted it was already daybreak, the sun coloring the eastern sky with fiery gold, "our next strike is fer Willis Steele, the cashier."

Something brought Steele early to the bank that day. He wore a troubled face—a desperate face—as he ascended the steps at twenty-five minutes to ten o'clock, nearly half an hour before time to open the bank.

"Mr. Steele."

A bright-faced boy came running up the steps.

"Well?"

The word was uttered rather impatiently, for Steele was in a horrible mood.

"I want to see you—on 'portant biz."
 "Have you a message?"
 "I ain't any messenger kid."
 "Who are you from?"
 "Nobody but myself."
 "I have no time to waste," declared the cashier, shortly turning to seek admittance from the watchman.

"You won't waste yer time with me," earnestly asserted Bob Braddock. "I know something that's goin' to interest you great."
 The cashier did not seem to hear the words at all.

"I know a feller what holds your I. O. U.'s fer a snug little bit, and he proposes to do you dirt," Bob went on, desperately.

Steele whirled, a savage exclamation coming from his lips.

"What's that?" he cried, stepping down to catch Bob by the shoulder.

"Don't git rattled," was the lad's calm advice. "If you want to save your own skin an' git ahead of Mr. Walden White, jest you take me somewhere that we can talk comfortable without bein' overheard. I'll give you a lay-down that'll knock ye clean daft."

"What do you know of Walden White and I. O. U.'s?"

"Come over here on a settee on the Square an' I'll tell ye. It's interestin', you bet!"

Only a moment more did Steele hesitate; then he followed the boy to a settee, where they both sat down, the cashier saying:

"Don't try any foolishness on me now!"

"Straight goods you git." Then the lad told Willis Steele a few things that made that young man's eyes glare like those of an angry lion.

He exposed Black Dirk's little game from start to finish, telling all that he and Frank Anson had overheard. After this, he was forced to let Steele in a measure into the facts of his own case. To end with, he tried to induce the cashier to lead Dirk into an attempt to rob the bank, as the rascal had planned, but Steele firmly shook his head.

"He must be shut off some other way," he declared; "for the whole matter would come out then, and I should be disgraced. We must devise another scheme."

And devise a scheme they did. Bob was the originator of it, but Steele perfected and filled in the details. The young man's face cleared wonderfully, and he caught the boy by the hand, exclaiming:

"By Jove! if this is all straight and works, I shall think you a trump! I like your appearance, and I believe we'll corner cute Mr. White!"

"That's what we will!" chuckled Bob. "We'll make him squirm."

"I will get off to-day and see to the messages. We'll work together. I must get off, for this game must go through! We must manufacture a message from your sister that will not fail to bring him to the flat."

"That'll be a cinch!"

CHAPTER XVI.

DAVE FINDS HIS MAN.

THE Spotter took good care that his sister should remain at the flat in Twenty-fourth street that evening, for he sent a message purporting to come from "John Snow" that said Snow had found the missing Bob and would bring him to the flat that evening.

Other messages were sent out, to "Mrs. Walden White" and to "White" himself, who was at Sheepshead, having found it impossible to keep from the races that day, even though he had a big scheme on foot. The rascal had not intended to return to the city until the last train that night, but the message brought him in so he could reach Jessie's flat before nine o'clock.

At 8:30 Bob and Frank Anson rung the bell at the flat and were admitted. Jessie was astonished when she saw them together, although she caught Bob in her arms and kissed him again and again.

She gave her hand to Frank, who took it half-fearfully.

"Where is Jack—Mr. Snow?" she questioned. "He sent a message stating he would come with you, Robbie."

"He'll be along later," was the boy's reply. "But I've got bad news for ye."

She led the way into the parlor.

"Mother—?" she cried, her face very pale.

The boy shook his head.

"No, father."

"What has happened?"

"He is dead."

The girl sunk upon a chair, burying her face in a handkerchief.

"Poor papa!" she said, huskily. "Did he forgive me?"

"Yes."

There was little time to talk of this, as they had arrived at the flat later than they intended, so Bob went on:

"Mother is so lonely; she wants you to come back. That is why I an' Frank came here to hunt for ye."

"Does she know I'm married?"

"How could she know?"

Then the girl asked Bob why he had not come to her sooner after being discharged from the hospital. There was a bandage about his head now, but he assured her the injury was slight. Then came the most difficult part of the whole matter. Frank Anson knew what was coming, and expressing a desire to get a breath of fresh air, he stepped outside. Within fifteen minutes Bob called him back.

Frank saw that Jessie had been dreadfully shocked. She was pale as death and her dark eyes were glowing with a mad fire. She paced the room like a caged animal, evidently trying to repress any show of violent emotion. She had shed no tears.

"Now," said Bob, "we must be ready for the others. They should be here now."

A ring at the bell came. The black girl announced a strange young gentleman.

"It's Steele," said Bob; and so it was.

Barely had the young man made his way into the parlor when the bell rung again. A woman was shown in.

"Mr. White?" she questioned, looking from one to the other, in surprise. "He is here? He sent for me."

"Then you are Mrs. Walden White?" questioned Bob. "Well, Mr. White'll be here right away, I think."

Willis knew the woman, and she was placed more at ease when he came forward. He took her into a corner and talked earnestly with her for some moments. He did not tell her the whole truth, by any means, but obtained her consent to step back behind the portieres when her husband came in.

Scarcely had all arrangements been made when there came a significant ringing of the bell.

"It is he!" said Jessie, excitedly.

In a moment the others moved back behind the portieres, where they could not be seen. Jessie unfastened the inner door and stood waiting the man near the center of the room. He came in with a rush.

"Hello!" he cried, in evident surprise.

"Thought you were sick and in trouble."

"I am in trouble," she answered, as calmly as possible. "Don't kiss me! I have a question for you. Am I your lawful wife—your only wife?"

"Of course you are!" he exclaimed, in a moment. "And you are the dearest little wife in the world!"

Out from behind the portieres stepped "Mrs. Walden White." She spoke not a word, but was pallid as death and shaking in every limb.

"Good God!" gasped the paralyzed man. "Emily!"

"Yes, Emily, your wife!" came icily from her quivering lips. "Oh, you miserable wretch!"

For a moment the tricked rascal could not utter another word; but he had nerve, and deliberately attempted a cool bluff.

"Well, somebody has played me a dirty trick in bringing you two together," he observed. "I'd like to see the fellow."

"Jest take a look at him!" and Spotter Bob stepped into the room from behind the portieres.

The man could not repress a great start.

"You?" he cried. "Why, I thought—" Then he stopped.

"You thought I was safely cared for by your pal, Budge Farrel. Well, Mr. Ex-Convict Budge has taken my place fer a while, an' I've dropped round to see how you're gittin' along with your two wives. Do you know what they call me sometimes? Well, it's Bob, the Rogue-Crusher. I've decided to do a little crushing in your case, seeing how you richly deserve a felon's fate."

With an angry snarl, Black Dirk stepped toward the boy. But he did not lay a hand on Bob, for Frank Anson suddenly appeared and blocked his path.

"You can't touch him!"

Now, Dirk was surprised.

"Are there any more behind those curtains?" he cried.

"One more!" said a calm voice, as Willis Steele came into the room.

"Steele!"

"Exactly."

"Well, you people have arranged a fine little surprise party for me!" sneered the villain, with affected nonchalance. "What do you propose to do about it?"

"I do not know what these ladies will do," replied Steele. "But you have a few I. O. U.'s of mine which I want to collect."

"So, that's the trick. Well, I'll pass them over with pleasure when you have the money for them."

"You will before, I surmise. You have been defrauding me and planning to ruin me from the start. Now, the tables are turned. You are welcome to what money you have squeezed out of me, even though I could send you up; but those bits of paper you must surrender."

"You fool yourself. I won't!"

"Then Budge Farrel shall be given a chance to peach, as he wants to, in order to clear himself. He is ready to swear you and he plotted to rob the Home Bank. You can see the kind of a box you are in."

The rascal's face grew black and then pale.

"If I give up the I. O. U.'s—then what?" he questioned.

"You can see I do not care to bring my connection with you before the public. I'll agree to press no charges against you."

For once in his life, Black Dirk's nerve was broken. He made Steele swear it, and then he surrendered the I. O. U.'s.

"What more is expected of me?" he sneeringly inquired, as he looked around at the scornful faces.

"Well, we have kinder got ye on the hip, Mister Black Dirk," spoke up Bob. "I think the only chance fer ye is to git out this country pretty lively. My sister intends to bring suit against ye for bigamy."

"If she didn't, I would!" cried the first wife, excitedly. "Oh, you wretch! After all I have endured from you!—after I have stood by you through everything!"

She broke down.

Frank Anson walked up to Dirk, his eyes burning like fire.

"Dastard!" he grated through his teeth. "If it were not for the ladies present, I would leave the score of my fist on your vile face! Get out of this house, you heartless scoundrell!"

"An' as ye go," added the young Spotter, "be happy in the thought that there happens to be another feller lookin' for ye—a feller what means to shoot on sight. He won't stop to do much talkin', for he ain't

got any tongue, but he'll pop you instant. Hope you'll run inter him. Good-day!"

Black Dirk went out. He was delighted to get off thus easily, but threw back a glance of malignant hatred as he left the room. Listening, they heard the front door close behind him.

"He is gone," said Willis Steele.

The sharp report of a revolver, close at hand, followed by a cry of pain, came to their ears. With one accord, they hurried to the door.

A man was lying on the walk not twenty paces away—a man whose upturned face revealed that he was already breathing his last. There was a bullet-hole in his breast.

"Suicide!" exclaimed Steele, as he recognized Black Dirk.

"No," came from Bob's lips. "Silent Dave has found his man!"

Silent Dave was never arrested for the killing of Black Dirk, the man of many names and many crimes, for the Man from 'Wayback disappeared as completely as if he had vanished into the earth. What became of him was never known.

Budge Farrel was set at liberty by an old woman who sometimes came to the basement of the ramshackle house where Bob had been held a prisoner; but the rogue soon did a little job at housebreaking that got him into trouble, and he was given a long sentence.

Poor "Mrs. Walden White" vanished, taking her child with her.

Willis Steele straightened up and eschewed horse-racing and gambling of every sort. The truth concerning his little flurry on the broad road that leads to ruin was never made public, and he finally married Marie Noland, the banker's daughter, the girl he devotedly loved.

Bob, Frank and Jessie returned to Philadelphia. All the girl's wild dreams were ended, and she felt that her life was ruined. The truth was kept from her poor mother, to whom she became a most untiring attendant. The glitter of the footlights had no further allurements for her, as she now understood the price many a girl pays in order to have her ambition rewarded.

Frank remained devoted to her, for all of his knowledge concerning her life in the great city; but she seemed to feel herself under a ban, and he had a long, hard fight to win her.

But, win her he finally did, and she makes him a true and faithful wife, delighting most in assuring his happiness.

Spotter Bob is "on the turf," as he expresses it. He has spoiled the crooked game of more than one rascal, and, as he seems to enjoy the sport of running down villains and villainy he has good reason to be proud of his title of Rogue Crusher.

THE END.

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